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AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S UNSPEAKABLE DOCTRINE OF THE SOUL

*Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology
of the Iḥyā'*

BY

TIMOTHY J. GIANOTTI



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For Michael E. Marmura

THE SECRET OF THE SPIRIT

It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through grasping the quiddity of its essence. It was not permitted for [even] the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than “the spirit is of my Lord’s command”.¹ Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death . . .

—al-Ghazālī, from the *Book of the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*
(*Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba’dahu*)

¹ Qur’ān: *al-Isrā’* (17): 85.

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INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

The nature of the soul and its fate after death are perhaps the core human mysteries. From Egypt, where the great Pyramids were built to house the dead Pharaohs and their provisions in the third millennium B.C.E., to Mesopotamia, where the first yarns of Gilgamesh's quest for eternal life were spun at roughly the same time (if not earlier), these were familiar puzzles to the ancient Near East. Not surprisingly, the mysteries of the soul and the Afterlife survived the eventual transition to monotheism and became crucial and often controversial questions within the Abrahamic legacy, finding specific expression in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic spiritual systems.

When the Hijaz witnessed the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, C.E., it saw him beset with many obstacles, including intellectual challenges contrived to test the depth and sophistication of his prophetic knowledge. One of the most famous of these challenges concerned the soul.¹ Pressed by unfriendly inquisitors to explain the spirit's true nature, the Prophet sought Divine assistance and eventually came back to them with a Qur'ānic verse that was as enigmatic as it was brief: "They ask you concerning the spirit: say, 'the spirit is of my Lord's command. Of knowledge, what you have been given is little'".² He offered no additional commentary or

¹ Both the earliest and fullest account of this three-point challenge is found in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*. See A. Guillaume's translation, *The Life of Muhammad* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 136 and following. Ibn Ishāq's account is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.

² Qur'ān: *al-Isrā'* (17): 85. Although this single verse (*āya*) has given rise to a variety of exegetical trends, we will only summarize the major ones here. Most of the earliest exegetes, including Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, and the biographer Ibn Ishāq, regarded this as a verse pertaining to the human soul, a "psychological" reading corroborated by later exegetes, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Others (al-Ṭabarī mentions a certain Qatāda [bn Dī'āma al-Sadūsī (d. 118/736)] and even a conflicting report from Ibn 'Abbās) insisted that "spirit" in this context referred to Gabriel, the Archangel, who served as the intermediary between the Prophet and God. The exegetical tradition has also been divided over the meaning of the noun *amr*, here translated as "command". In places, al-Ghazālī's seems rather to read this singular noun as "matter" or "affair", thus rendering the verse, "of my Lord's affair" or, more loosely, "my Lord's business"; see *kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* (discussed in ch. 4), where he calls the spirit "a wondrous, divine thing (*amr*)" (vol. III, 151), and *Jawāhir*

explanation, and his Companions and later coreligionists all agreed that the Prophet's silence was binding upon them all. Thus, rather than shedding new or additional light on this ancient riddle, the early Islamic tradition covered the soul with a heavy silence, sealed by the Prophet and guarded by the faithful.

In the formative centuries that followed, marking the dawn of Islam and its first intellectual florescence, the majority of the intellectual zeal—at least among the ranks of the pious—was devoted not to such esoteric questions but to the basic systematization and codification of the new religion. Thus, the early scholars, or *'ulamā'*, began specializing in obvious areas that had practical applications in people's daily lives, areas such as the proper methods of interpreting and reciting the Qur'ān (*'ulūm al-qur'ān*), the gathering and verification of the reports regarding the Prophet's words and deeds (*'ulūm al-ḥadīth*), the "understanding" (*al-fiqh*) and codification of the Islamic way of life, based on the *sharī'a*, a Divine code of conduct prescribed by the Qur'ān and the Prophetic example, and the assembling of the creed (*al-'aqīda*)—i.e., the scholarly authorization of a list of non-negotiable beliefs required of anyone calling themselves a "Muslim". Intertwined with the evolution and codification of the creed was a science of dogmatic theology (*al-kalām*)³ that relied upon

al-Qur'ān (Beirut: dār al-khayr/dār al-āfāq al-jadīda, 1988), 28. In other places, such as *al-Madnūn al-ṣaghīr*, he interprets it spatially, saying the *rūḥ* is "from [the world] of Divine Command", i.e., the "world of the *malakūt*". The standard Qur'ānic usage of the noun *amr* in the singular is "command", and the majority of exegetes thus take the verse's meaning to read, "the spirit is of my Lord's command." While the exegetical variations will ultimately fall outside the parameters of this study, al-Ghazālī's reading(s) will be discussed more fully below. By far the fullest and most insightful treatment of this *āya* in English can be found in Duncan B. MacDonald's article, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam," *The Moslem World*, vol. XXII, no. 1 (January, 1932). McDonald fails, however, to note the multivalence present in al-Ghazālī's own use of the term.

³ Both speculative and scholastic, *kalām* is a very difficult phenomenon/movement to translate. "Dogmatic theology" strikes us as the most appropriate rendering due to the fact that, generally speaking, these "theologians" (*mutakallimūn*) took the Revelation as their starting point and used reason to explain and defend it, thus constructing a world-view to accommodate it. In spite of this, "dogmatic theology" has not been very common as an English rendering. Some (following the lead of the Muslim philosophers) have opted for "dialectical theology" due to the characteristically argumentative (dialectical) nature of a great many *kalām* texts. More technically, the philosophers argued that many or most of the views shared by the theologians were based on commonly accepted notions (*al-mashhūrāt*) that are not necessarily true. Hence their conclusions, not based on necessary premises, yielded dialectical conclusions rather than demonstrative ones. Still others have opted for

logic and dialectical argumentation as it sought to clarify, explain, systematize and defend the creed.

In other words, establishing the specifics of the orthopraxy (“*islām*”) and the orthodoxy (“*īmān*”) consumed the attention of the vast majority of religious scholars in the first centuries of the faith. Some Muslims, however, sensing a danger in an increasingly exclusive focus upon the external requirements of the faith, began to elucidate and codify a complementary science of the inner life (“*iḥsān*”), a science also rooted in the Qur’ān, the Prophetic custom, and the practice of the closest Companions. This was called by some scholars and practitioners “the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of the heart” or, alternatively, the “Science of the Way of the Afterlife” (*‘ilm tarīq al-ākhirā*), and it included both a practical, action-oriented knowledge that concerned the purification of the heart and a theoretical dimension that entered into the mysteries of faith.

Acknowledging the ongoing validity and necessity of the this-worldly science of jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*), these scholar-practitioners of the inner way argued that external form was not enough as they turned their attention to the scrutiny of inner acts, i.e., to the study of the attitudes, intentions, and mental states that are essential for the purification and governance of hearts striving to make their way toward God. Thus the sphere in which these “Doctors of the Afterlife” (*‘ulamā’ al-ākhirā*) exercised their judgment and authority was the unseen world of the heart, a subtle domain beyond the perception of physical eyes yet perceivable through experience and the spiritual eye of intuitive understanding.

One of the most celebrated of these scholar-practitioners was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 504 A.H./1111 C.E.), a renowned scholar of the Shāfi‘ī *fiqh* tradition and the Ash‘arī school of dogmatic theology (*kalām*) who abandoned his prestigious professorship at the Nizāmīya college or *madrassa* in Baghdad in order to live a life of poverty and walk the path of inner purification and experiential knowledge. As he matured in mental state and advanced in spiritual station, he wrote copiously, and it was during his initial ten year seclusion following his “escape” from the public life of Baghdad that

“speculative theology” because of the preoccupation that many of the *mutakallimūn* had with speculative or theoretical reflection. Lacking a perfect equivalent in English, I will simply use the Arabic term *al-kalām* and its nisba adjective *kalāmī* throughout the study.

he composed his *magnum opus*, *Reviving Religious Knowledge* (*Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*),⁴ essentially a forty-volume primer or manual for spiritual education and formation in Islam.

One of al-Ghazālī's chief complaints recorded in the Introduction to this work is against the religious scholars of his own day, the ones to whom the ongoing guidance of the wider community had been entrusted. Rather than humbly serving God by seeking to enlighten and fortify their brothers and sisters, he says, they had become enamoured with themselves, setting themselves up as celebrities and authorities in all fields, engaging in public debates for their own glory, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the rich and the powerful. In the light of these disturbing developments, al-Ghazālī forwarded the bold suggestion that real religious knowledge had passed away, even as Islam, as a political force, had come to dominate a vast portion the civilized world, and so, he explains, he was driven to compose a work that would endeavor to resuscitate religious knowledge in Islam. In the light of this explanation, then, the entire work is rightly seen as "a compendium of all Muslim religious sciences . . . interpreted and arranged from a single point of view: how to make preparations for 'seeing God' (*ru'yat Allāh*) or 'meeting with God' (*liqā' Allāh*) in the Hereafter".⁵

The question of self-knowledge lies at the heart of this work, and so too does the secret of the spirit, which is the human being's quiddity or true reality. For al-Ghazālī, knowledge of the soul's true nature is both essential and problematic for the pilgrim making his way to the hereafter. It is essential because it contains the true knowledge of life and death—verities that are, for the majority of believers, mediated through veils of sensual imagery. The ultimate journey toward the Truth (*al-haqq*), which is God, becomes then a gradual purgation of these and other sensual images in order to make way for the true knowledge of the realities they signify. This purgative process is the path of self knowledge, in its most exalted sense, and

⁴ While this is usually translated more literally as the "Revival of the Religious Sciences", "Reviving Religious Knowledge" captures the essence of the project more completely, I think. Throughout this study, I will be basing all translations on the Arabic text annotated by al-Imām al-Hāfiẓ al-'Irāqī (Beirut: Dār al-khayr, 1993).

⁵ This apt characterization of the *Ihyā'* is borrowed from the Introduction to Kojiro Nakamura's translation of al-Ghazālī's *Invocations and Supplications* (*kitāb al-adhkār wa'l-da'wāt*), originally published in Tokyo (1973), revised and republished by the Islamic Texts Society (Cambridge: 1990), xx.

the knowledge it bestows is crucial to attaining a state of proximity to the Divine. “The gnosis of the heart,” he writes, “and of the reality of its characteristics (*ḥaqīqat awṣāfihi*) is the [very] fundament of religion, and the basis of the [mystical] path of the wayfarers”.⁶

The problematic side of knowing the soul’s true nature concerns how one comes to know it, for its expression is strictly forbidden, and it cannot be taught openly, let alone committed to writing. This is in accord with the Prophetic prohibition of venturing beyond “the spirit is my Lord’s affair” or “the spirit is of my Lord’s command”. Al-Ghazālī nevertheless intimates in many places that it *is* possible for one to come to know the soul’s secret—along with many other Divine secrets—as one journeys along the path of spiritual initiation, purification, and experience. Indeed, he writes as one who has himself been initiated into such mysteries, which for him fall under the category of the “Science of the Unveiling”—the theoretical side of the Science of the Way of the Afterlife. The crucial question of how such secrets can be learned or taught remains unanswered, however, at least in any specific or satisfying way.

Speaking of the secrets of the Unveiling in the Introduction to the *Ihyā’*, he writes,

the prophets (may the prayers of God be upon them) have only spoken with humanity about the knowledge of the way and the [right] guidance to it. As for the knowledge of the Unveiling, they never spoke of it save through symbol (*ramz*)⁷ and [indicative] gesture[s] by way of example and [brief] summarization: a [kind of] knowledge on their part⁸ of the inability of people’s understandings to bear [the Unveiling]. Now the learned are the heirs of the prophets, and [so] they do not have any means of turning away from the path of consoling [the people] and emulating [the prophets].⁹

In other words, while he leaves open the possibility of experiencing the Unveiling and even sharing the experience with others, he makes it clear that the learned are bound by the prophetic precedent of restraint in this matter. Symbol, gesture, and summarization are the only avenues open for such expression.

⁶ From the *Book of Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart* (*Kūāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb—Ihyā’*, vol. III), 112.

⁷ The word *ramz*, translated here as “symbol”, carries the nuance of “puzzle” and “ruse” in addition to indirect signification.

⁸ Literally, “a knowledge from them” (*‘ilm minhum*).

⁹ From the Introduction (*al-muqaddima*), 10.

The findings that form the foundation of this present work reveal that al-Ghazālī does indeed deem himself to be in possession of the keys to the spiritual puzzle of the soul and that he does disclose these keys to his readers, but not directly, never fully, and certainly not to everyone. Our goal then is to pursue the allusions and brief flashings of esoteric content that lie scattered throughout the forty books of the *Ihyā'* in order to uncover what we can of al-Ghazālī's guarded doctrines of life and death, all of which hinge upon the question of the true nature of the spirit or "heart".

These more intimate allusions and partial flashings of an esoteric psychology often create tension with his more mainstream theological formulations of the soul and the Afterlife, formulations that seem to insist upon the materiality of the spirit (and thus the corporeality of the Afterlife). Such tensions have made al-Ghazālī one of the most controversial and tantalizing characters in all the 1400 years of Islamic tradition. As it strives to achieve some final clarity in these matters, then, the present work must address and resolve these tensions arising from his varied treatments of the soul with an eye toward his esoteric cosmology and eschatology. In doing so, it radically rethinks his personal position on the Afterlife, a related question that has been the focus of controversy and continuous debate from his own lifetime right up until the present day.

A series of interrelated questions are formulated at the outset of the study, and these provide the essential structure for a systematic analysis of al-Ghazālī's writings on the soul and the Afterlife. The first and most general of these questions concerns his position on the nature and role of written instruction (ch. 1), where we try to make sense of the characteristically varied and sometimes conflicting content one finds in al-Ghazālī's writings as a whole. Separating and sorting the various genres al-Ghazālī employs in his vast corpus of writings, this chapter highlights the parameters and qualifications al-Ghazālī himself imposes upon each particular form of discourse. Once these parameters and qualifications are examined, a path opens for our analysis of his varied statements concerning the soul, statements that must always be taken within the bounds of the particular genres in which they occur. When these lines are carefully observed, perceived conflicts between statements belonging to separate genres are rendered far less problematic, as we will see in our examination of his psychology. Next in our investigation, then, comes the com-

plex question of the soul's true nature (ch. 2–6), an investigation that follows the lines of al-Ghazālī's own epistemological journey: from dogmatic theology (*al-kalām*), a science bound by the linguistic expressions of the creed, to Neo-platonic philosophy, a science built upon rational demonstration, and finally to a first-hand mystical experience within the "heart" (*al-qalb*), where the ultimate rational verities are revealed. The final questions of this study concern the true meaning of death and the verities of the Afterlife (ch. 6), well-guarded regions of al-Ghazālī's mind that become more accessible once some light is shed on his personal understanding of the soul's true nature.

All this yields a fresh yet close reading of al-Ghazālī's most intimate thoughts on life and death, a reading that promises much more than initially meets the eye.

Overview of Chapters

1. All Things to All People? Deciphering al-Ghazālī's Doctrine of Discourse

When exploring the case of the soul, any student will quickly find that al-Ghazālī's terminology is highly self-conscious, at times plainly evasive, often equivocal and ambiguous, sometimes even contradictory, especially when texts of a particular genre are compared with those of another. The reader is thus frequently put in the position of a tracker, trying to pursue and compare the technical terms of particular genres and particular audiences while being mindful of unfolding time and changing contexts. In al-Ghazālī's case, this is further complicated by the question of a possible evolution or shift in his thought through the course of his professional life. The present study, then, in its effort to pin down and clarify al-Ghazālī's position on the real nature or quiddity of the human being, *qua* human being, commences with all the caution of a complex experiment, which must begin by showing the problem clearly and by isolating and separating the variables which so complicate the equation at hand.

The most fundamental of these variables is the nature and role of written discourse itself, a form of instruction that takes many forms and serves many ends in al-Ghazālī's vast corpus. The flummoxing variety of al-Ghazālī's statements concerning the soul makes this

question both elementary and unavoidable for us. In fact, the tension generated by this variety is so obvious that the reader gradually begins to wonder whether the problem is posed intentionally rather than being the unfortunate mess left by a brilliant but undisciplined mind. Although scholars have argued many sides of this question, including the position that al-Ghazālī simply tried to be all things to all people, all agree that the tensions and ambiguities are real and beg resolution.

When it comes to treating the topic of written discourse itself, however, al-Ghazālī leaves little room for ambiguity; in several places, he carefully delineates the various types of discourse that he employs and clearly identifies the respective ends for which each is suited. Once these are brought to light, the prospect of untangling the seeming contradictions and resolving the tensions becomes less daunting. When faced with the familiar puzzle of different and often divergent treatments of the very same subjects, the reader has only to step back and study the types of discourse in which the various statements occur. Once the type of discourse is identified and the reader becomes aware of its uses and misuses, its legitimate functions and the functions for which it is in no way intended or suited, it becomes easier to understand what is really being said in each of the various contexts. The first chapter is thus devoted to the study of al-Ghazālī's doctrine of discourse—his theory of the essential nature and function of every kind of religious writing.

Although many texts are consulted in the course of this chapter, his *Book of Knowledge* (*Kitāb al-'ilm*) and his *the Bases of Belief* (*Kitāb qawā'id al-'aqā'id*)—being respectively the first and second books of the *Ihyā'*—stand forth as crucial works in this chapter, where special attention is also given to al-Ghazālī's position on the related issues of concealment, disclosure, and the utilization of multilevel writing in achieving multiple ends. Once his multipurpose and multi-genre approach to written instruction has been identified and understood, we are enabled to tackle the more substantive challenges by paying close attention to the context(s) and to the very clear terminological trends identifiable in the various genres he espouses when treating the subject of the soul.

Drawing on the findings of this first chapter, the following chapters embark upon a systematic, genre-specific investigation of his theory of the human soul by grouping and analyzing works that share a similar idiom and approach. Following the general stages of al-

Ghazālī's own development,¹⁰ we identify these groupings or genres respectively as the theological, the philosophical, and the mystical.

2. *al-Ghazālī's Dogmatic/Theological (kalāmī) Formulation of the Soul*

Although it is certain that al-Ghazālī was formally trained as an Ash'arī *mutakallim* and theologically adhered to many of the doctrines common to the Ash'arī "school", the extent to which his *kalāmī* doctrine of the human soul followed that of his Ash'arī forebears and contemporaries has been subject to dispute. His usage of the technical term *jawhar* ("substance" or "atom")¹¹ proves crucial to this question. The texts most central to this chapter are the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* and *al-Iqtisād fī 'l-'itiqād*,¹² the latter being a non-*Ihyā'* text that is essentially a more detailed version of the dogmatic texts that constitute the *Qawā'id*.

According to most medieval and contemporary interpreters, these works contain explicit repudiations of the theory of the soul's immateriality and argue for a somewhat standard Ash'arī doctrine of the soul's materiality.¹³ This is brought into question by some, however, who speak of fine, subtle departures, of both omission and commission, in al-Ghazālī's use and application of the *jawhar* in comparison with its employment by his Ash'arī colleagues and predecessors.¹⁴ All, however, agree that al-Ghazālī's position is problematic at points, both philosophically and dogmatically. We thus return to the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā'id* in order to discern for ourselves his dogmatic position on the soul. As we do so, the main trends in recent scholarship concerning his relationship to the Ash'arī school will also be considered.

¹⁰ See *the Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazālī* (being a translation of al-Ghazālī's autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*), W.M. Watt, trans. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1953, 1994), esp. chapter III, 26–66.

¹¹ "Substance" reflects the usage of the Islamic philosophical tradition, while "atom" reflects the signification common within the *kalām* circles. Much more will be said concerning al-Ghazālī's use of this term in the second, third, and fourth chapters.

¹² Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥusayn al-tijārīya, 1950).

¹³ See especially Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in [the] *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtisād*" in the *Aligarh Journal of Islamic Thought*, no. 2 (1989), 56–7.

¹⁴ See Richard Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), esp. 48 and following. See also, Kojiro Nakamura, "Was al-Ghazālī an Ash'arite?" (Tokyo: Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, No. 51, 1993).

Although our own reading of his *kalāmī* psychology comes down on the side of the soul's materiality, this adds little to our final evaluation of what these texts can reveal of al-Ghazālī's intimate thoughts on the true nature of the soul. We must recall his own clear and decisive disclaimers about the limits of theological discourse (ch. 1), for he is uncompromising on the point that the sole utility of the *kalām* lies in explicating the creed of the common believers and in destroying, through dialectical argumentation, heretical innovations to the creed. Its real and only purpose, then, is of a protective nature; hence, its practitioners are to be regarded as intellectual bodyguards or dogmatic policemen rather than as explicators of the truth who delve into the realities of things. Indeed, as a "science" (*ilm*) or "craft" (*ṣinā'a*), the *kalām* is thoroughly inappropriate for any kind of speculative investigation into the verities, he says, and is forever restricted to the level of common belief. Seeking al-Ghazālī's candid opinion on the true natures of things, in the *Ihyā'* and elsewhere, we are told in no uncertain terms to fish in other waters. We then turn to his encounter with philosophy, specifically the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, whose psychology and eschatology received a great deal of attention from al-Ghazālī.

3. *al-Ghazālī's Condemnation of the Philosophical Psychology and Eschatology in the Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Tahāfut al-falāsifa)¹⁵

In chapters eighteen, nineteen and twenty of his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī explicates and refutes three interrelated Avicennian doctrines crucial to our investigation: (i) the immateriality of the soul, (ii) the impossibility of the soul's extinction; and (iii) the symbolic nature of all corporeal imagery pertaining to the Afterlife. In a way, al-Ghazālī's treatments of Ibn Sīnā's positions on these points complete the stage for the rest of the study, for they masterfully explicate some of the doctrines that later philosophers, such as the Andalusian Ibn Ṭufayl, claim al-Ghazālī himself adopted in other places. While our tendency might be to regard the psychological arguments of the *Tahāfut* as outright refutations of Ibn Sīnā's psychological and eschatological doctrines, a careful reading of the text

¹⁵ Maurice Bouyges, ed. (Beirut: Dār el-Machreq, 1927), reformatted by Majid Fakhry (third printing, 1982).

reveals that al-Ghazālī's challenges never attack the truth of the Avicennian premises; rather, some focus on the presence of other viable possibilities while others focus solely on the validity of the "demonstrations" by which "the philosophers" claim to prove their doctrines of immateriality (thereby denying the logical necessity of the philosophers' assertions).

In other words, al-Ghazālī's famous and often brilliant refutations of Ibn Sīnā's psychological and eschatological doctrines turn out to be meticulous expositions of the fact that such beliefs are not the direct outcomes of demonstrative necessity. Thus, the *Tahāfut* does not always directly attack the philosophical doctrines *per se* or even entertain questions of truth, for it was never written to affirm or establish belief; rather it was designed to shake the proud foundations of the Avicennian positions, which were in his mind leading some intellectually curious Muslims into dangerous waters.¹⁶ The fact that al-Ghazālī composed the *Tahāfut* to tear down rather than build up a particular position is not to say that these discussions are irrelevant to the rest of our investigation; on the contrary, they are very relevant indeed. However, al-Ghazālī's arguments in the *Tahāfut* cannot be embraced blindly when we raise the question of truth, i.e., the question of what al-Ghazālī himself believed to be real and true. For this we must look to other works of different natures, works that are concerned more about truth and less about logical premises and their necessary conclusions. So we are brought at last to the stage of mysticism, where he found his own fulfillment in life and where his discussions of the soul assumed a unique and more revealing character.

4. *the Heart (al-qalb) and al-Ghazālī's Mystical Discussions of the Soul*

In this chapter, as well as the ones that follow, we shift to an utterly different idiom, that of the heart and its journey in life, sleep, and death into the realm of the unseen (*ʿālam al-ghayb* or *al-malakūt*). And this shift of idiom signals a shift of genre, from the craft of *al-kalām* to the contemplative and speculative dimensions of the Science of

¹⁶ For example, al-Ghazālī mentions in his introduction that some of the Muslims enamoured with philosophy (as well as with their own cleverness) had begun making light of the Religious Law and scoffing at its requirements and prohibitions. More will be said of this in chapter three.

the Way of the Afterlife. Although the works highlighted in the previous chapters, particularly the *Kitāb al-‘ilm*, continue to serve our study, the seminal texts in this category are the *Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart* (*Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*)¹⁷ and the *Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (*Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba’dahu*).¹⁸ Because it has an unusual pertinence to our investigation of the heart, the disputed “Treatise of [Divine] Presence” (*al-Risāla al-ladunīya*),¹⁹ though dubious in authenticity and certainly not part of the *Ihyā’*, is given special attention in an appendix to the study. Although the language itself in these works is more enigmatic than the tight, technical idiom of the dogmatic texts, we encounter explicit passages that affirm the self-subsistence of the human soul and more ambiguous statements that seem to suggest its immateriality, a suggestion that clearly is at variance with the arguments and formulations of the previous chapters.

While al-Ghazālī does not in these mystically-oriented texts object to the belief in an immaterial soul *per se*, nor to its complete separability from the body, he still takes objection to the coupling of this belief in an immaterial soul with a flat denial of an eventual return to an embodied state for judgment and eternity, an Afterlife that includes (but is not restricted to) bodily pleasures and/or torments. So, although separability is no longer a problem, still questions remain: namely, just what is this “spirit” or “heart”, and what is its nature? What is the nature of its connection to the body? Is it some kind of subtle or ethereal material atom or substance (*jawhar*) or is it immaterial and immortal, subsisting entirely on its own? Also, what is the nature of the pleasures and pains that the heart can experience in total separation and independence from the body and its members? Are they the same kind of next worldly “pleasures superior to the sensible” whose reality al-Ghazālī seems to affirm in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,²⁰ *Mizān al-‘amal*,²¹ and other works? And, if the spirit can experience these more vivid “feelings” without the mediation of corporeal “tools” or “instruments”, then why the scriptural necessity of an embodied afterlife?

¹⁷ *Ihyā’*, vol. III, 112–169.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, 74–202.

¹⁹ From *Majmū‘at rasā’il al-imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya), 87–111.

²⁰ See Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 54. More will be said of this below.

²¹ First printing with limited commentary by Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya, 1989). These references to the pleasures and pains of the hereafter will be fully treated below.

In the *Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, he answers some but not all of our questions. The answers which he provides us, however, beget still more questions, and it is clear that there are things that al-Ghazālī will not discuss regarding the true nature of the heart. This is due to restrictions of appropriateness and pious reserve more than to a lack of knowledge it seems. Having seen much of this revealing/concealing dynamic in the first chapter, we should not be surprised or discouraged by his characteristic enigmaticism; rather, we should pay extra attention, recognizing that its presence alerts the reader to the proximity of esoteric substance. Indeed, through the veil of his highly self-conscious restraint, what we may call his esoteric or spiritual psychology gradually begins to take shape, a secret understanding of the soul that seems to have more in common with the psychology of Ibn Sīnā than with his own *kalāmī* psychology examined in the second chapter.

In the *Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba’dahu*, the fortieth and final book of the *Ihyā’*, al-Ghazālī is somewhat more guarded than he was in the *Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, but still he repeats much of what we have seen in the other texts. He explains that by “heart” he means “spirit” and that by spirit he means “that meaning (*al-mā’nā*) of [the term] man that apprehends the sciences and [feels] the pangs of grief, and the delights of joys.” This, he says, is the real nature of the human being, that which “does not die” and “is not extinguished.” Further, he says that, by “death”, he means “no more than the cessation of its [i.e. the spirit’s] direction of the body and the body’s departure from being its [i.e. the spirit’s] tool.”

This explanation, he admits, is not exhaustive, and he does not intend it to be, for he goes on to say that

It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through grasping the quiddity of its essence. It was not permitted for [even] the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than “the spirit is of my Lord’s command.”²² Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all

²² Qur’ān: *al-Isrā’* (17): 85.

that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death . . .²³

Thus, he leaves us with questions, unanswered and seemingly unanswerable. But he also leaves us tantalized by the possible presence of an answer; indeed, in this passage, he clearly affirms the possibility of discovering the secret, an affirmation echoed in many other works,²⁴ and yet he also recalls the prohibition against sharing the discovery. Thus, he leaves the reader intrigued, anxious for more. He also here admits that death has a “true nature” which is not and cannot be known until the secret of the spirit is known, and so, although he points to the key for unlocking the verities of death and the Afterlife, he discloses neither the key’s true nature nor its whereabouts.

This chapter, then, while bringing us closer to unveiling the mysterious nature of the heart in the more experientially-oriented and non-dogmatic thought of al-Ghazālī, does not bring us to the end of our search. For example, the soul’s immateriality—so central to Ibn Sīnā’s psychology and eschatology—has nowhere been affirmed or denied within the context of al-Ghazālī’s esoteric formulations. It thus stands out as a huge gap in our understanding of al-Ghazālī’s spiritual psychology. Also, the nature of the spiritual heart’s localization within the body remains something of a mystery. Our one and perhaps only remaining chance for clarification on these and other questions is to venture into the *malakūt*, the world of the Unseen, which is the home “world” of the heart and the theatre in which the heart “witnesses” its supreme experience of the Unveiling (*al-mukāshafa*). If we are able to win some clear understanding of the true nature of this aspect of al-Ghazālī’s cosmology, it may well shed some light on the true nature of the heart, which belongs to this realm and ultimately “returns” to it after death. It is finally to the world of the Unseen, then, that we go for answers.

²³ *Dhikr al-mawt (Ihyāʾ*, vol. VI), 132.

²⁴ Such as *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 27.

5. *Through a Looking Glass: The Heart Reflected in al-Ghazālī's Mystical Cosmology*

This chapter, then, continues to pursue al-Ghazālī's mystical treatments of the heart, now in the context of his cosmology, the most important element of which is the *malakūt*, the psycho-spiritual "world" with which the heart has a special connection and to which it ultimately belongs. In determining the true nature of the *malakūt* and identifying the precise relation that exists between it and the heart, the study attempts to tie the true nature of this realm to the true nature of the heart, thus addressing his spiritual psychology through his mystical cosmology. This somewhat circuitous approach, given al-Ghazālī's explicit linkage of the cosmological worlds with the Divine attributes and the psycho-spiritual stations of the wayfarer, is very much in keeping with the internal integrity of al-Ghazālī's mystical thought. A thorough grasp of this connection, we venture, has the potential to yield some of the final pieces for solving the puzzle of the soul.

Some tentative conclusions are then drawn regarding al-Ghazālī's personal doctrine of human nature, an apparently unspeakable doctrine whose ramifications are both profound and problematic. In addition to the texts already introduced to the study, especially the *Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart*, the *Book of Affirming [Divine] Unity and Relying [Upon God]* (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*)²⁵ and the *Book of Love* (*Kitāb al-maḥabba*)²⁶ play crucial roles in this chapter.

6. *The Wayfarer's Final Journey: al-Ghazālī's Esoteric Eschatology*

These doctrines surrounding the nature of discourse, the structure and substance of the cosmos, and the reality of the soul will, in turn, directly influence our reading of al-Ghazālī's eschatological utterances—his discussions and descriptions of death and the afterlife. Thus, after carefully reviewing some of his more substantive treatments of the afterlife in the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, the *Kitāb dhikr al-mawt*, and other works, both within and without the *Iḥyā'*, this final chapter offers some pointed reflection on al-Ghazālī's esoteric doctrine of

²⁵ *Iḥyā'*, vol. V, 114–178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 180–262.

death and the afterlife, a puzzle that seems to fall into place once some light has been shed on the soul's true nature.

In short, our reading suggests that, in spite of the somewhat graphic attention he gives to the literal details of the Afterlife, al-Ghazālī's personal position on the true nature of the next world cannot include corporeality, at least in an ontological or extramental sense. At the same time, however, it does indicate a psycho-spiritual "realm" that is *experientially* multilevel, including corporeal torments and pleasures. This is intimated by his frequent recourse to the intramental corporeality of the dream experience, an *experiential* reality that he characteristically points out in the middle of his eschatological commentaries. This is further corroborated by a close analysis of the language he uses to describe the phenomena waiting beyond the threshold of death, descriptions that are almost always framed in the language of the individual's *perception*, which is for him far more important than the ontological status of these things in a theoretical vacuum. One might also take as corroborating evidence al-Ghazālī's theory of the universal (discussed in ch. 3), which differs from that of Ibn Sīnā in that al-Ghazālī's "universal" is never divorced from the phantasm, and so it comes closer to our concept of an archetype than to a universal in the Aristotelian sense. Put more simply, al-Ghazālī's theory suggests that abstract thought is never fully liberated from the images and experiences of earthly life; thus, the "universal" is, for him, a synthetic and superlative concept, as opposed to an eternal, unchanging, and truly universal intellectual object. Even the very pinnacle of the mystical experience is, for al-Ghazālī, tantamount to a shift in perception rather than an ontological transformation; in other words, the moth is thus never *really* consumed by the flame, even though that may be the moth's *experience* of its encounter.

Having said all this, it may well be argued that al-Ghazālī is, in reality, subscribing to the very same philosophical psychology and eschatology that he condemns in the *Tahāfut* and other works and that, in doing so, he is subscribing to more than one truth: one for the masses (religious/exoteric) and one for the elite (philosophical/esoteric). While it must be granted that his esoteric psychology and eschatology are extremely close to those of Ibn Sīnā, we argue nonetheless that a profound difference still stands between them. What is most crucial to unlocking al-Ghazālī's eschatology vis-a-vis the philosophical eschatology, which he condemns with fair consistency and (we argue) in good faith, is that, while the philosophical

treatments of psychology and eschatology are all ontologically-oriented, al-Ghazālī's almost exclusive focus is on the individual's *experience* of these realities, which are always perceived in sensual, corporeal forms. Ontological speculation about such matters is, to him, both irrelevant and distracting—a waste of valuable time—time that would be better spent preparing for the inevitable ordeals of death, reckoning, and eternity. In our reading, his unflinching insistence upon the belief in an Afterlife that includes corporeal torments and pleasures is extremely consistent with his esoteric thought, for he believes it to be true to the servant's *experience* (which only in the rarest of cases can be completely devoid of the mind's material imagery), and, even more importantly, he sees it as being most effective for focusing the reader's efforts and attention on the true task-at-hand, which is the all-important challenge of reforming one's character and living one's life in preparation for the eternal journey, which he explains is both "wearisome and toilsome," involving "a great many dangers, [trials] for which there are no instructions and no companion . . ." ²⁷

While the theoretically-oriented philosophers focus on the ontological "truths" of the soul and the Afterlife, al-Ghazālī is far more concerned with the afterlife as the ultimate experience awaiting every soul and with the soul as the subject or theatre of that ultimate experience. The materiality or immateriality of the experience and its receptacle are of little importance, especially for one fully occupied with the task of getting ready.

Conclusion

As has become clear, the main contribution of this work lies in its penetration and explication of al-Ghazālī's guarded doctrines of life and death, all of which hinge upon the question of the true nature of the heart. Ultimately, however, it must be granted that these speculative or theoretical points were never intended to be ends in themselves; indeed, it becomes evident to the attentive reader that, for al-Ghazālī, even the highest and most perfect theoretical knowledge is of no avail without practical application in one's everyday life. The conclusion thus brings us full-circle back to the primacy of practice,

²⁷ Taken from his own Introduction to the *Ihyā'*, 8.

to the all-important tasks of surrendering the self, following the prophetic precedents, and walking the path of piety and spiritual purification. The flashings of esoteric insight, then, ought to be seen as subtle enticements, the purpose of which is to kindle a desire for the higher realities, rather than as attempts to communicate a philosophical system in coded, piecemeal form. While we can show that al-Ghazālī privately agreed with much or even most of Ibn Sīnā's psychology, we can never cast him as real Avicennean, for he remains a creationist through and through, and it is clear that his reader's moral development, rather than the accuracy of his theoretical conceptions, was ever the master's real priority.

CHAPTER ONE

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE? DECIPHERING AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S DOCTRINE OF DISCOURSE

I seek refuge from knowledge that has no benefit.¹

Since the time of Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), al-Ghazālī's true position on many topics has been suspect. This is especially true of his eschatology, which has been taken by some to be a strict and literal adherence to the descriptions found in the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions and by others (such as Ibn Ṭufayl) as a pious façade behind which lay a philosophical doctrine that rejects all corporeality and relegates the literal meanings to metaphors—allegories useful for the instruction of the weak-minded masses but ultimately untrue. Whatever the case may be, al-Ghazālī's numerous and highly varied treatments of such key questions as the nature of the human soul and the realities of the Afterlife leave in his wake some profound ambiguities that continue right up to the present day. Commenting upon al-Ghazālī's somewhat perplexing habit of speaking differently to different audiences, Ibn Rushd says that he was everything to everyone: ". . . he adhered to no one doctrine in his books but was an Ash'arite with the Ash'arites, a Sufi with the Sufis and a philosopher with the philosophers . . ."² This, says Ibn Rushd, was because he wanted to arouse the minds of the religious to philosophy and the minds of the philosophers to religion.

While Ibn Rushd's accusation of adhering to no single doctrine may or may not be accurate, he did put his finger on a basic problem that every student of al-Ghazālī must ultimately face: the characteristically varied and sometimes conflicting content one finds in

¹ Prophetic Tradition cited in his Introduction to the *Ihyā'* (8). This study will not be focusing on the strength or veracity (*siḥḥa*) of the Prophetic Traditions employed by al-Ghazālī as much as it focuses on the points in the service of which he uses them. Thus, in the pursuit of al-Ghazālī's thought, we will often skip over the process of hadith extraction (*al-takhrīj*), which would be significant were our focus al-Ghazālī's somewhat utilitarian use of such Traditions.

² From Ibn Rushd's *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*, translated by George F. Hourani in *Averroes On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Messrs. Luzac & Co., 1961), 61.

al-Ghazālī's writings. This is further complicated by al-Ghazālī's employment of a wide variety of genres and techniques, from dogmatic explications and allegorical representations (intended for the generality of believers) to brief flashings of mystical disclosure (intended for a more restricted, more advanced audience). This problem was perhaps first identified by Ibn Rushd's fellow Andalusian and forebear, Ibn Ṭufayl, who clearly took the unwieldy nature of al-Ghazālī's corpus to be intentional:

As for the books of the shaykh Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, [the matter] depends on [whether or not] he is addressing the generality: for in one place he holds back, while in another he lets go; he [in one place] declares [people] infidels because of things that he [himself] adopts [in other places]. Furthermore, in the light of everything on account of which he condemned the philosophers in the book *Tahāfut*, such as their denial of the Gathering of the Bodies and their affirmation of reward and punishment exclusively for the souls, he then said in the beginning of the book *Mizān*, "This is definitively the doctrine of the Sufi shaykhs . . ." [On top of this] he then said in the book, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl wa'l-muḥṣiḥ bi'l-aḥwāl*, that his [personal] doctrine is in accord with the doctrine of the Sufis and that his personal position came to rest on that doctrine after long research. Whoever carefully examines his books of this kind and scrutinizes their speculative content [will find that] there is a great deal to be seen. But he makes excuses for doing this at the end of the book *Mizān al-ʿamal*, where he describes that there are three kinds of views [belonging to a master]: a view that he can share with the generality while they are around him; a view that is [adjusted] in accordance with the way he addresses each [individual] person asking questions or seeking guidance; a view that he keeps to himself and that does not go forth [from him] except to those who share his doctrine.

Then, after that, he said, "In [the course of] these expressions, even if there only had been [material] that cast doubt upon your inherited belief, that would have been enough of a benefit. For if one does not doubt, he does not look; and the one who does not look does not see; and the one who does not see remains [lost] in blindness and perplexity." Then he quotes this line of poetry: "Take what you see and forget about what you've heard; The appearance of the sun wipes Saturn away."

This is the character (*ṣifa*) of his [method of] teaching: most of it is symbols and an indications³ from which no benefit can be derived except for the one who first grasps them himself through an inner vision and then, secondly, hears them from him [i.e. al-Ghazālī], or

³ Literally, "a symbol and an indication" (*ramz wa ishāra*).

for one who is [already] prepared for their understanding, one of a superior innate disposition, for whom the slightest indication suffices.

He said in the book, *Jawāhir* [*al-Qur'ān*], that he has books that are restricted from all but their intended audience and that he has placed in them the pure truth. To our knowledge, nothing of these has reached *al-Andalus*. Rather, books have reached [us] which some claim are those restricted [books], but the matter is not so. Those books [that have been mistaken for esoteric disclosures] are the book *al-Ma'ārif al-'aqliya*, the book *al-Nafkh wa'l-taswīya*, *masā'il majmū'a*, and others. These books, even if they do contain indications, do not contain much more esoteric disclosure (*al-kashf*) than what is established in his popular books. Perhaps there is, in his book *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* [*fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-husnā*] material that is more ambiguous than the material in those [supposedly esoteric books], but he himself has stated that *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* is not a restricted work. From that it necessarily follows that these books which have reached [us] are not the restricted ones. Some contemporary [readers] have imagined, based on his statement occurring in the latter part of the book *Mishkāt* [*al-anwār*], an outrageous thing that has cast him into an abyss from which [there remains] for him no salvation. It is his statement following the mentioning of the [various] classes of those veiled by veils of light, [and] then his movement into the mentioning of "those who have arrived [at the ultimate goal]", [who he says] come to believe that this Great Being is described by an attribute that negates pure unicity. [These contemporary accusers] wanted, on the basis of that [statement], to pin on him the belief that the Truth—be He glorified—in His Essence has some kind of plurality. Be He greatly exalted above what the transgressors say!

We harbor absolutely no doubt that the shaykh Abū Hāmid is among those who won the highest felicity and reached those noble, sanctified stations. However, his restricted works that contain the [knowledge of the] Unveiling have not reached us.⁴

There is much that warrants our attention in this passage. From the context, it is clear that there was a great deal of controversy surrounding the writings of al-Ghazālī in Ibn Ṭufayl's day. While Ibn Ṭufayl seems unwilling to go along with those accusing al-Ghazālī of a belief in some kind of multiplicity within the Godhead, he does acknowledge that al-Ghazālī's corpus is loaded with tension and ambiguity, and he seems confident that all this was intentional, i.e., part of al-Ghazālī's method. Specifically regarding al-Ghazālī's eschatological doctrine, Ibn Ṭufayl's twinning of statements from the *Mizān* and the *Munqidh* is both accurate and pointed, for al-Ghazālī does

⁴ *Ḥayy bn yaqzān*, Farūq Sa'd, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīda, 1992), 113–115.

indeed disclose in the *Mizān al-ʿamal* that the Sufis and the “monotheists among the philosophers”⁵ (*al-ilāhīyūn min al-falāsifa*) uphold an Afterlife which is utterly suprasensible. And he says much more than this. In the section “elucidating that the slacking off from the quest of faith is also stupidity”, he explains that

regarding the matter of the Hereafter, people are of four [general] divisions: one group believes in the Gathering and the Resurrection [of bodies] and in Paradise and Hellfire, just as the religious teachings have articulated and as the Qurʾān has clearly described. They affirm the sensual pleasures, [all of] which reduce to [the pleasures of] marital relations, taste, smell, touch, clothing, and visual delights. They confess that there are kinds of happiness and types of pleasures in addition to these, pleasures that elude the description of those [wishing to] describe them. These are “that which no eye has seen, no ear heard, that which has not occurred to the heart of a human.” [They acknowledge] that [all] that continues forever without interruption. [And they also avow] that it can only be attained through knowledge and works. These are the Muslims essentially; indeed, [all of] those who follow the prophets, mostly among the Jews and Christians.

The second group—some of the monotheists among the philosophers—acknowledge a kind of joy whose modality has not occurred to the human heart, and they call it “intellectual bliss”. As for the sensible [pleasures and torments], they deny their [ontological] existence from the external [perspective], yet they affirm them along the lines of the imagination in the dream state. But sleep becomes cloudy and obscure by reason of [our] awakening. And that [state in the Hereafter] knows no bemuddlement; rather it is made permanent. They claim that [this perpetual dream state] is fixed for a group of people who are enamored of sensible things, for those whose inclination is restricted to [such sensible pleasures and punishments], who do not rise to [the level of] intellectual joys. Now this [doctrine] does not lead to a state which necessitates a slacking off in the [religious] quest. For being delighted [by something] is rather what occurs within the soul as a result of being influenced or effectuated by [the sensible experience] of something touched or seen or tasted, etc. The external thing thus is the cause of occurrence of the effect. Now if it is possible for the effect to occur within the soul without the exterior thing [to trigger it]—just as in the state of sleep—then there is no need of the external thing.

⁵ While Shams al-Dīn is inclined to interpret “*al-ilāhīyūn*” as metaphysicians, we take the term to be a less technical reference to the religious philosophers, most notably—although not exclusively—the Islamic philosophers, such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who upheld the doctrines of God’s unity, prophecy, afterlife, etc. For Shams al-Dīn’s reading, see his Arabic commentary to the *Mizān*, 12 (n. 1).

[As for] the third group, they go [even] to the absolute denial of sensory pleasure, [concluded] by way of [their doctrines of] reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*) and imagination (*al-khayāl*). They claim that the imaginative faculty obtains [its images] exclusively through the bodily tools and that death severs the relationship between the soul (*al-nafs*) and the body, which is its tool in [serving] the imaginative faculty and in all things of a sensory nature. After it is cleft from the body, [the soul] never returns to its management of the body. Thus, the only things remaining are torments and pleasures that are not of a sensible nature but are greater than the sensible ones.

For, in this world as well, the human tendency is toward the intellectual pleasures, and his aversion is likewise to intellectual forms of suffering. In light of that, [humans] despise being humiliated, preferring to guard [their misdoings] rather than allowing their shame to come to light: [hence the man's] concealing of [his] desire for intercourse and undergoing the [physical] pains and difficulties [that result]. Indeed, one might well prefer to go without food for one or two days if he could, by doing this, attain the delight of victory in chess in the light of his strong desire. So the joy of victory is an intellectual joy. One might well rush upon a large number of [enemy] soldiers in order to slay [them], taking for his compensation whatever is decreed for his soul of the delight of praise and the joy of being credited with valor. [This group] claims that the sensations, when compared to the joys [truly] existent in the hereafter, are grossly inadequate. Their relation to [the true joys] is almost like the relation between grasping the aroma of delicious food and its [actual] taste, or the relation between gazing upon the one who is the object of desire and actually having intercourse with him/her—no, [the difference between the corporeal pleasures and the true joys] is even more distant than [these examples].

They claim that all this is remote from the understanding of the masses, to whom these pleasures have been presented in [the guise] of things they know from sensible experience. It is just like the youth who is occupied with his studies and to whom is promised a judgeship or a ministerial post. In his youth, he does not comprehend the [particular] joy of either position, and so he is promised things from which he takes great delight, such as a curved staff with which he can play or a small bird with which he can play around, as well as [other] things of this nature.

So where does the joy of playing with a little bird stand in relation to the joy of kingship or of a ministerial post? Since his understanding is incapable of grasping the higher thing, he is presented with the baser thing in order to incite his desire, [by which] he is amiably and pedagogically led to the thing wherein resides his [true] happiness. This [view] too, if it is correct, does not necessitate any slacking off in [regard to] the quest [of religion]. On the contrary, it requires even more seriousness.

It is to this [degree] that the Sufis venture, as well as the monotheists

from among the philosophers in their turn, to the extent that the Sufi shaykhs have explained without having been guarded [in their speech]. They have said that whosoever worships God in order to seek Paradise or in order to take precaution against the Hellfire is base. However, the quest of those [whose hearts are] intent upon God is a more noble thing than this. Whoever sees [first hand] their masters and seeks out their beliefs and studies the books of the writers among them will understand that this credal belief [flows] definitively from the gushing courses of their experiential states.⁶

Thus, while these views differ greatly in their respective interpretations of the Afterlife, al-Ghazālī seems to be saying that all of them are acceptable, at least in this context, for each encourages its particular proponent to take the faith and the practice very seriously. None of them, according to this sympathetic explication, encourages or even tolerates a “slacking off” from the religious life, which is the real thrust of the entire passage. Though each group differs in its definition of the felicity and torment awaiting each individual, the felicity and torment are nevertheless stressed by all three positions, and al-Ghazālī’s recognition of this fact infuses the entire discussion with an even, affirming tone. Does this imply that all three are salvifically valid in his view? How do we reconcile this tolerant, even affirming, treatment of the philosophical eschatology, which he groups with the doctrine of the Sufi masters, with the harsh and detailed condemnation of it in the *Tahāfut*?⁷ These are difficult questions, made even more difficult by the scholarly consensus dating the work prior to the *Ihyā’*,⁸ very soon after the composition of the *Tahāfut*.⁸ Further, when these conflicting texts are joined by al-Ghazālī’s subsequent self-identification with the Sufis (evidenced throughout the *Ihyā’* and much later in the *Munqidh*), it makes the *Mizān-Tahāfut* contrast even more problematic, for the Sufi self-identification suggests some affinity with the philosophical doctrines of the afterlife, at least if we take the statements in the *Mizān* at face value. Does this mean that al-Ghazālī was won over by the philosophical concepts concerning the afterlife shortly after he condemned them in the *Tahā-*

⁶ *Mizān*, 10–12.

⁷ See chapter three.

⁸ See Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1959), 23–29. See also George Hourani’s “A Revised Chronology of al-Ghazālī’s Writings” in *JAOS*, vol. 104, no. 2 (April-June, 1984), 289–302, esp. 294–5.

ful? Although Ibn Ṭufayl fails to consider the possibility of the *Mizān* representing a moment of dramatic development—even conversion—in al-Ghazālī's thought on these issues, still his identification of an inter-textual problem is quite pointed and worthy of our attention.

In fact, had he included the late work *Faiṣal al-tafriqa* in his assessment, Ibn Ṭufayl could have shown the problem to be even more pointed, for here al-Ghazālī seems to reverse the position of the *Mizān* in his explicit condemnation of “the position of most of the philosophers”: i.e., the denial of the resurrection of bodies, the return of the souls to their bodies, and the reality of sensible punishments in the Hereafter. These teachings, he says in the *Faiṣal al-tafriqa*, had caused great harm to the religion, and “anyone associated with them must be declared an infidel”.⁹

In spite of such obvious textual tensions and in spite of Ibn Ṭufayl's assessment of al-Ghazālī as a teacher who intentionally wove complexity, contradiction, and ambiguity into the fabric of his writings, many scholars, both medieval and contemporary, have taken al-Ghazālī on the whole to be a strong and consistent upholder of the corporeal Afterlife. This is in keeping with al-Ghazālī's staunch promotion of Sunni orthodoxy right up to the end of his life, a dogmatic position that is itself a complex question begging further study within the context of Seljuq politics and social policy. Within the last fifty years, Professor W.M. Watt stands out as one of the strongest proponents of the view that al-Ghazālī was an uncompromising materialist when it came to the Afterlife. On the grounds that the “philosophical” eschatology seemingly tolerated in the *Mizān* is too remote from al-Ghazālī's usual stance, he first discounted the statement, and indeed the entire book, as a spurious attribution¹⁰ and later seems to have softened his view to regard it as an early and immature work abrogated by al-Ghazālī's later, more mature thought.¹¹

It is possible that Ibn Ṭufayl, who does not complicate his reading with the question of chronology, is being unfair when comparing statements in the *Mizān*, which by all evidence was written prior to al-Ghazālī's departure from Baghdad (i.e., before he actually took

⁹ *Faiṣal al-tafriqa*, from the collection, *majmū'at rasā'il al-imām al-Ghazālī*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 1986), 132.

¹⁰ See his “The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī” in *JRAS*, 1952, 24–45.

¹¹ See M.A. Sherif's *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY, 1975), 170–189.

up the Sufi “way”), with statements made after he had been initiated into the experiential way of the Sufis? In other words, what al-Ghazālī means by “Sufi” in the *Mizān* may be quite different from what he means by the term in the context of the *Munqidh*, which was written much later than the *Mizān* and well after he had come to know Sufism in an altogether different way. This may be why there is no reference to the “Sufi shaykhs” in relation to the philosophical doctrines of the Hereafter in the *Faiṣal al-tafrīqah*, which is dated even later than the *Munqidh*.

Whatever the case may be, there is certainly ample textual evidence for taking Ibn Ṭufayl’s reading with a degree of gravity and for exercising caution when assessing al-Ghazālī’s “mature” position on the true nature of the Afterlife, so explicitly promised and abundantly described in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions. More generally, this particular discussion of the Hereafter helps to illustrate for us why there has been a problem when it comes to the interpretation of al-Ghazālī’s writings as a whole and why we need to begin by addressing the larger questions surrounding the tensions and seeming contradictions that have made al-Ghazālī a point of controversy for nearly a thousand years.

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the characteristically varied and sometimes even conflicting content one encounters in the vast corpus of al-Ghazālī’s writings makes the question of discourse—his understanding of the nature and role of the various types or genres of religious writing—unavoidable. Certainly, in the case of the human spirit or soul, the entire investigation depends upon the successful resolution of this question, for, without a framework in which to contextualize his extremely varied statements about the soul, our journey would ultimately lead to a heightened state of bewilderment and frustration. On the other hand, if we can identify the type of discourse in which each statement occurs and understand clearly what the scope and limits of that genre are, then we stand a much better chance of winning some clarity about what is actually being said in each instance. Thus, before we can embark upon a substantive investigation of any aspect of his vast writings, we must become acquainted with his overall writing scheme and the various kinds of discourse he employs in the service of his multifaceted agenda.

When examined all together, al-Ghazālī’s works fall into several discernible categories: (i) works written to elucidate and refute the thought of the chief Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Sīnā; (ii)

works of dogmatic theology (*al-kalām*) written to explicate and defend the traditional creed of Islam (*i'tiqād al-salaf*), often in the face of heretical ideas and beliefs; (iii) works of a legal nature; (iv) works whose primary aim is to motivate and assist the believer in living the Islamic way of life, both externally and internally, thus preparing him/her for death and the Afterlife. This fourth group treats the practical dimension of what he calls "the Science of the Way of the Afterlife" (*ilm tarīq al-ākhirā*), and it—of all these groups or types of writings—is the one with which he concerned himself the most. Indeed, the entire *Ihyā'* can be seen as a single, seamless work of this category even though it incorporates most of the other categories in its all-embracing vision of Islam as a complete vehicle moving its faithful toward an ultimate encounter with God.

The vast majority of the discussions belonging to this fourth group are designed to be both inspirational and practicable, composed to motivate and guide the reader to a particular course of action. This action-oriented side of the Science of the Way of the Afterlife is called the "knowledge of Right Practice" (*ilm al-mu'āmalā*),¹² about which much more will be said below. Strewn throughout all of the texts in this fourth category, one finds flashings of another kind of discourse, a parlance specific to another kind of knowledge—the gnosis of the spiritual verities, a theoretical knowledge that comes through the seeker's first-hand "eye witnessing" or experience of the higher realities. This is what he terms the "knowledge of the Unveiling" (*ilm al-mukāshafa*), an experiential mode of knowing bestowed upon God's prophets and God's "friends", or *awliyā'*.¹³ Although this is, properly speaking, the theoretical or contemplative dimension of the Science of the Way of the Afterlife, we may consider this a fifth

¹² "Right Practice" is an admittedly imperfect rendering of *mu'āmalā*, which implies one's conduct within a social context (indicated by the third form of the Arabic verb) as well as one's active practice of the religion. For al-Ghazālī, of course, both dimensions—i.e. the social and the personal—cannot be separated from a righteous intention within the heart, which is also included within his somewhat broad use of this term. The terms "spiritual formation" and "social virtue" might also capture some of the nuances of his usage.

¹³ While often rendered as "saints" in English, the Qur'ānic plural noun *awliyā'* (sing. *walī*) connotes intimacy, friendship, and alliance with God, a relationship that also involves Divine protection. For a survey of both the Qur'ānic and post-Qur'ānic usages of this term, see Hermann Landolt's article, "Walāya", in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade, ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1987), vol. 15, 316–323.

type of discourse, albeit one that appears and disappears with a characteristic suddenness, like a leviathan moving freely in the ocean of his writings.

As intriguing as this fifth category may be, such flashings cannot be a starting point when it comes to our investigation of his classification of the religious sciences; indeed, we should first attend to the other, more straightforward types of “scientific” discourse in which he engaged and to which he devoted much more time, effort, and ink. And so it is to these more predominant genres and to al-Ghazālī’s classification of them that we must turn.

*al-Ghazālī’s Classification of the Religious Sciences and their Respective
Forms of Discourse*

As was stated above, the genre of religious writing to which he devoted the vast majority of his time and ink is the practical side of the Science of the Way of the Afterlife, and so this is the first genre to which we shall turn. Next we will take up the legal/jurisprudential writings, which are second in volume and are quite closely related to the writings on Right Practice. After these come his theological works, much fewer in number than the previous genres. Next in this quantitative regression should come the works of philosophical explication and refutation, but, as these lie beyond the scope of the present chapter (not being religious in nature) and, as the next chapter is devoted exclusively to the chief work in this category, we shall not be discussing them here. Finally, we will return to al-Ghazālī’s explanations of the mysterious knowledge of the Unveiling and try to make sense of its role in the light of the entire corpus of his works.

When it comes to spiritual and religious direction, al-Ghazālī is a most practical man. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the *Ihyā’* itself, which is designed to be a step-by-step manual for religious and spiritual formation. In his own Introduction to the multi-volume opus, he gives a general overview in which he describes the nature of the entire work and the situation that prompted him to write it:

By my life! Your persistence in arrogance is due solely to the disease that has now spread to [infect] a large number of people. Indeed, it

has [now] enveloped the masses due to [their] inability to identify the heights to which this matter has reached [and due to their] ignorance of the fact that the situation is so and [that] the calamity is serious, and [that] the afterlife is before [us] and this life is behind, and [that] the moment of death is nigh and the journey is long, and [that] the provisions are slight and the danger immense, and [that] the road is blocked. [They cannot see the fact that] only that which is purified for the face of God by way of knowledge and deeds will [suffice] as a reply before the Examiner of keen vision. Wayfaring along the path of the Afterlife is wearisome and toilsome, [for it] involves a great many dangers for which there are no instructions and no companion.

The guides for [this] road are the learned, who are the heirs of the prophets. However, the age has become empty of them and all that remains are those who follow in their footsteps. Satan has overcome most of them; tyranny has seduced them; and each one, being enamoured [with himself], has started to rush after his own plan. And so that which is good has begun to be regarded as abominable, and that which is morally repugnant has begun to be regarded as good, so much so that the shelter of religious knowledge is now wiped away, and the light of guidance is now incomprehensible in the quarters of the earth. [These pseudo-learned] have succeeded in leading humanity (*al-khalq*) to believe that there exists no knowledge apart from [three things]: (1) government ruling[s] upon which religious judges depend for period[s] of feuding, when the common people riot; (2) disputation with which the glory-seeking [scholar] arms himself in order to achieve supremacy and silence [his opponent]; or (3) the elegant, adorned prose that the preacher uses to string along the common folk and gain favor with them. [The common misperception of religious knowledge] is due to the fact that they [i.e., the learned] could not see beyond these three [paths of study] as ways to snare forbidden [fruits] and net the vanities [of this world].

Here we witness the beginning of al-Ghazālī's sharp criticism of the ways in which the scholarly class has misled the public in the guise of religious authority. They have done this, he says, in order to promote themselves more than God's cause, and the result has been the total reversal of the good and the bad in popular perception. Things that were once widely regarded as being reprehensible had come to be regarded as good and virtuous, and those things that had once been esteemed as virtues had come to be despised and regarded as base. In short, al-Ghazālī is saying that the world of religious scholarship had degenerated into a self-serving contest of egos, bent upon the pursuit of glory, fame, influence, and wealth rather than upon the service of God. Following this sharp criticism,

he turns to the real religious knowledge that he is hoping to bring back to life through the writing of this book.

As for the Science of the Way of the Afterlife and for that which is in keeping with our righteous forebears (*al-salaf al-ṣālih*), [being] part of what God—be He exalted—calls in His book understanding (*fiqh*), wisdom (*hikma*), knowledge (*ilm*), luminescence (*diyā*), light (*nūr*), guidance (*hidāya*), and right direction (*rushd*), [over time]¹⁴ it became a thing folded up [and forgotten] among people, became a “thing utterly forgotten”.¹⁵ Inasmuch as this constituted a disastrous fissure in [the bedrock of] the religion and an [utterly] dark affair, I came to view the publication of this book as a [very] important thing, as [a way of] bringing back to life the [true] sciences of religion, revealing the ways of the spiritual leaders (*al-a’imma*) who came before, and elucidating for the readers¹⁶ the beneficial sciences [that have been handed down] from the prophets and the righteous forbears.

I have set up [the work] in four quarters—acts of worship (*al-‘ibādāt*), habitual acts (*al-‘ādāt*), mortal vices (*al-muhlikāt*), and saving virtues (*al-marjūyāt*)—and I begin the whole thing with the *Book of Knowledge* because it is of the utmost importance. First of all [I do this] in order that I make known the knowledge that is devoted to the service of God according to the words of His Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation), the [kinds of knowledge that are] required to be sought. [To this effect] the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “the pursuit of knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.” [Secondly, I begin with this book] in order that I may distinguish the beneficial knowledge from the harmful, since the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “I seek refuge in God from knowledge that has no benefit.” [All this is] in order that I correct the present generation in their inclination away from the way of what is right, in their willingness to be duped by glimmering phantoms, and in their [total] contentment with sciences [that treat] the outer husk [rather than] the essential core.

The quarter [treating] the acts of worship contains ten books: The Book of Knowledge; the Fundamentals of Belief; the Secrets of Purification; the Secrets of Prayer; the Secrets of Almsgiving; the Secrets of Fasting; the Secrets of Making Pilgrimage; the Etiquette of Reciting the

¹⁴ The temporal lapse is indicated here by the particle ف (“*fā*”).

¹⁵ Literally, “became a thing utterly lost, forgotten.” His Qur’anic tone here is worthy of note; the Muslim reader cannot help but notice a powerful idiom of despair borrowed from *Sūrat Maryam* (19): 23.

¹⁶ This word is somewhat tentative. Literally, it seems to read “for those who are reached [by the book] . . .” I take it to be a broken plural of the rather rare active participle from the passive voice verb *nūhiya*, which is synonymous with *bal-gha* (to come to s.o., to reach s.o., to come to the knowledge of s.o.).

Qur'ān; the Book of Invocations and Supplications; and the Book of Ordering the Superogatory Devotions According to the [proper] Times.¹⁷

As for the quarter [devoted to] the etiquette of habitual actions, it is comprised of ten books: the Etiquette of Eating; the Proper Manners of Marriage; the Legal Rulings (concerning) the Acquisition [of Wealth]; the Book of the Permissible and the Prohibited; the Etiquette of Friendship and Social Interaction with the [various] Kinds of People; the Book of Private Retreat;¹⁸ the Etiquette of Travel; the Book of Audition and Ecstasy; the Commanding of the Good and the Prohibiting of the Bad; and the Etiquette of Living¹⁹ and the [Moral] Character Traits of Prophecy.

As for the quarter [treating] the mortal vices, it [also] contains ten books: the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart; the Disciplining of the Soul; the Book of the Harmful Effects of the Two Desires ([that of] the belly and that of the genitals); the Harmful effects of the Tongue; the Harmful Effects of Anger, Harboring Resentment and Envy; the Book Reproving the World; the Book Reproving Wealth and Miserliness; the Book Reproving High Social Standing and Hypocrisy; the Book Reproving Arrogance and Conceit; and the Book Reproving Delusion.

As for the quarter on the saving virtues, it [likewise] consists of ten books: the Book of Penitence; the Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving; the Book of Fear and Hope; the Book of Poverty and Asceticism; the Book of Affirming Divine Unity and Relying [upon God]; the Book of Love, Yearning, Intimate Friendship, and Contentment;²⁰ the Book of [Right] Intention, Truthfulness and Sincerity; the Book of Attentive Observation and Self Examination; the Book of Contemplation; and the Book of the Remembrance of Death.

In the Acts of Worship quarter, I mention some of the hidden secrets of their proper performance, the fine points of their customary practices, as well as the secrets of their meanings—whatever the practicing scholar feels obliged to perform. Indeed, there is not a single one

¹⁷ Such *awrād*, consisting of selected Qur'ānic passages (often repeated), praises of the Divine, pious salutations (blessings upon the Prophet) and supplications, are observed after regular worship and at various other times throughout the day and the night, each day (from daylight to sunset) involving seven *awrād* and each evening (from sunset to daylight) involving four. See *Ihyā'*, vol. 2, 4–71, esp. 6–32. See also K. Nakamura's translation of the Invocations and Supplications and W.M. Watt's translation of *the Beginning of Guidance (Kitāb bidāya al-hidāya)* in *Faith and Practice*, 95–168, esp. 101–136.

¹⁸ Or "seclusion/withdrawal".

¹⁹ Here the translation corrects a printing error in the edition: the second consonant, ʿ (*ayn*), is missing in *ma'īsha*, the word for "way of living". As this is printed properly in the context of the book itself (vol. III), it is easily corrected here.

²⁰ This points to the wayfarer's station of "contentment with the decree of God—be He exalted" and is "one of the highest stations of those [saints] who have been brought nigh." See *Ihyā'*, vol. V, 240.

among those steeped in the knowledge of the Afterlife who is not apprised of [these things]. Most of these [points]²¹ are among the things neglected by the art of the jurisprudential disciplines (*fann al-fiqhīyāt*).

In the section on the habitual practices, I mention the hidden aspects of the forms of social interaction that naturally take place among human beings, the depths [of these interactions] and the fine points of their customary practices and the hidden aspects of the sacred nature of their courses [of occurrence]. And [these guidelines for habitual interaction] are among the things that no religious person can do without.

In the [books discussing] the mortal vices, I discuss every blameworthy character trait whose avoidance is mentioned in the Qurʾān, [along with] the soul's cleansing from it and the heart's purification from it. And for every one of these character traits I mention its reality and its limit.²² Then I mention the cause by which it was generated; then the harmful effects that result from [each of] them; then the signs by which they are recognized; then the various treatments by which one can deliver himself [from] them. All of this is tied to the testaments of [Qurʾānic] verses, [Prophetic] Reports, and Traditions [relating to the Prophet and the Companions].

In the [final] quarter [dealing with] the saving virtues, I mention every praiseworthy character trait and desirable quality among the qualities of those [saints] who have been brought nigh [unto God] and of those who are truthful, the qualities by which the servant is able to draw nigh unto the Lord of the Worlds. In the discussion of each and every quality, I mention its reality and its limit²³ and the reason for which it is [sought after and] appropriated, as well as its fruit through which it benefits [people], the [distinctive] signs by which it is known and its virtue for the sake of which it is desired. [And all this is] in the context of what is related about each [virtue] from the testaments of the religious law and the intellect.²⁴

The entire *Ihyāʾ* is designed to be a detailed and accessible handbook for human perfection, beginning with the outer, action-oriented perfection of the person's worship and social dealings and culminating in the inner, disposition-oriented perfection of the mind or heart.²⁵ This entire journey, al-Ghazālī explains, both outer and inner, entails the outer and inner aspects of the knowledge of Right Practice.

²¹ Literally, "most of that (*akthar dhālika*) . . ."

²² Here, "limit" might suggest parameter or even definition.

²³ See *supra*.

²⁴ From his introduction to the *Ihyāʾ*, vol. 1, 8–9.

²⁵ This inner "purification of the heart" of all that is not God, he says in his autobiography, is the first condition of walking the mystic path—i.e., the path of walking "on the road to God". See W.M. Watt's translation in *Faith and Practice*, p. 63.

Thus the science of Right Practice divides into an exterior science, by which I mean the knowledge of the bodily actions, and an interior science, by which I mean the knowledge of the actions of hearts. That which is in accordance with the bodily extremities is either an act of worship or a habitual act. That which is received by the hearts—which are, by virtue of their concealment from the senses, from the realm of the *malakūt*²⁶—is either praiseworthy or blameworthy. It is thus necessary that this science divide into two halves: an outer and an inner. The outer half, [which is] connected with the [movements of the] limbs, divides into a habitual act and an act of worship. The inner half, connected with the states of the heart and the character traits of the soul (*akhlāq al-nafs*), divides into a blameworthy [state] and a praiseworthy [state]. Thus all of them together [form] four divisions, and any theoretical investigation into the science of Right Practice must not go outside of these divisions.²⁷

These, then, are the outer and inner dimensions of the knowledge of Right Practice, the practical wisdom of how to shape and direct one's life toward the Afterlife. As an exterior science, it deals with human actions within a social context, and this essentially takes up the first half of the *Ihyā'*. As an interior science, it deals with the states and orientations of the human heart, the topics treated in the latter half of the *Ihyā'*. Whether inner or outer, however, it is crucial to remember that this knowledge is both designed and presented to be immediately applicable and practicable, even though at times it is imbued with tremendous mystery, the substance of which lies beyond the scope of the praxis-oriented *mu'āmalā*.

In the *Book of Knowledge*—written as the opening book of the voluminous *Ihyā'*—he lays out a very clear classification of the intellectual disciplines essential to the religious life, and at the heart of all of it runs the very same spiritual utilitarianism—a shrewd separation of the necessary and the useful from the ornamental and superogatory. Quite in keeping with our expectations, then, following a brief introduction extolling the virtues of knowledge, from both the perspectives of learning and teaching, he plunges into the knowledge that is required for each and every individual Muslim (*fard 'ayn*), regardless of rank or capacity:

²⁶ A detailed discussion of this psycho-spiritual “realm” to which the true nature of the heart belongs is given in chapter five of this study.

²⁷ Introduction, 10.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation, said, “Seeking knowledge is a required duty for every Muslim.” He, may God bless him and grant him salvation, also said, “Seek knowledge, even if it’s in China.”

People differ [in their opinions] concerning the knowledge that is a requirement for each and every Muslim; indeed, they have split up [on this issue] into more than twenty camps. We shall not prolong [the discussion] by conveying [all] the finepoints [of each]; however, the upshot of all of this is that every group brings down the [charge of] necessity upon [the science] that is in front of them. To this effect, the theologians say that [the knowledge required of every Muslim] is the science of *al-kalām*, since by means of it *al-tauḥīd*²⁸ is grasped and the essence and attributes of God—be He exalted—are known. [As for] the scholars of the religious Law, they say that it is the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), since the acts of worship, the permissible and prohibited [things], and the permitted and prohibited actions are [all] known [by means of this science] and because through it they concern themselves with [the things] that individuals require, apart from rare occurrences [requiring special, case-specific rulings]. And the Qur’ānic exegetes, along with the scholars of Ḥadīth methodology, say that it is the knowledge of the Book and the Prophetic Custom (*al-sunna*), since through these two one gains access to all of the [religious] sciences. The Sufis say [that] what is intended by [the universal obligation] is this science.²⁹ Others³⁰ of them say, “it is the servant’s knowledge of his [own] state and station in reference to God, be He magnified and greatly exalted,” while others say, “it is the knowledge of true sincerity (*al-ikhhlās*), the harmful effects of the [lower] souls, and the distinction between the angelic visitation and the demonic visitation.”³¹ Still other [Sufis] say that it is the knowledge of the inner [dimension], and that [knowledge] is required for special peoples—namely, those who are qualified [or suited] for that [knowledge]³²—and they put aside the literal meaning of the expression [in favour of its metaphorical signification]. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī says, “[the knowledge that is required for every Muslim] is the knowledge covered by the [Prophetic] report wherein lie the foundations of Islam; it consists of his (may God

²⁸ While often translated as “Divine unity” this verbal noun is more appropriately rendered “the act of affirming of Divine unity.” In light of the fact that it is such a fundamental aspect of Islamic faith, I prefer to leave it in its original rather than to opt for the more convenient but less accurate translation.

²⁹ Here, “this science” might indicate the mystical path of knowledge walked by the Sufis, or it could refer to the science of the Qur’ān and the *sunna*, mentioned immediately before. The Arabic, like the English, is ambiguous.

³⁰ Literally, “some of them . . .”

³¹ Literally, “the visit of the angel (*lammat al-malak*) and the visit of the devil (*lammat al-shaytān*).”

³² Literally, “its folk (*ahl dhālika*)”.

bless him and grant him salvation) utterance, 'Islam is built upon five [things]: a bearing witness that there is no god except for the God . . . to the end of the report'.³³ This is because what is required are these five, and thus the knowledge of how they are [properly] performed is required as well as [the knowledge of] the nature of the obligation.³⁴

This final opinion—i.e., that the knowledge required of every Muslim consists of knowing how to perform five pillars (or the required acts of *al-islām*) and understanding the reason why these acts are obligatory—is the one al-Ghazālī himself supports and explains in greater detail. Although seemingly separate from the “Sufi” opinions mentioned above, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī—the proponent of this view—was and continues to be widely revered as a master of the inner sciences, and he will make frequent appearances throughout this and other texts. It is also worth noting that there is nothing overtly “mystical” about this quotation; indeed, it is extremely down-to-earth, practical, non-controversial, applicable to all Muslims of all persuasions and capacities. This is a foreshadowing of the nature of al-Ghazālī's own style, which is consistently and characteristically oriented toward the practical side of the spiritual life. Immediately following the quotation above, he continues:

We will mention that which ought to be declared with certainty and cannot be doubted: namely, as we introduced in the prologue, that knowledge [of the Way of the Afterlife] divides into the knowledge of Right Practice and the knowledge of the Unveiling, and the only aim in this [use of the term]³⁵ knowledge is the knowledge of Right Practice. And Right Practice, to which the mature, rationally-awakened servant assigns [the notion of] works, is threefold: [right] conviction, [right] action, and [right] renunciation. For, if a rationally-awakened man reaches puberty or old age sometime in the morning before noon, for instance, the first thing required of him is to learn the two phrases of the testimony of faith and to understand them both. [This testimony consists of] saying, “There is no god save the God; Muhammad is the emissary of God.” It is not required of him to win for himself

³³ Although this *ṣaḥīḥ* tradition comes in a few slightly different versions, the basic text runs, “Islam is built upon five [things]: a bearing witness that there is no god except for the God and that Muhammad is the emissary of God; the establishment of [the daily] prayer; the giving of alms; pilgrimage to the house [i.e., the Ka‘ba in Mecca]; and fasting the month of *Ramaḍān*.” See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-īmān*, ch. 2; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-īmān*, ch. 5.

³⁴ *Ihyā'*, vol. I (*a l-'ilm*), 23.

³⁵ From the context, it is quite clear that “this [. . .] knowledge” refers to Prophet's use of the term in the Ḥadīth tradition quoted above.

some disclosure of [the mysteries] of that [testimony] through speculative reason, research or through the employment of proofs; rather it suffices for him to assent to it and believe in it with absolute certainty, without any quivering of doubt or disturbance of soul. That [belief] is obtained through sheer acceptance [of tradition] and from oral instruction without any research or demonstration. Thus the Prophet of God (may God grant him peace and salvation) was content with the [simple] assent and affirmation of the uncivilized among the Arabs without [their] learning any [corroborating] evidence.

If [one of these] did that, then he fulfilled the immediate obligation.³⁶ The knowledge which is immediately required of everyone is the learning and understanding of the two phrases [of the testimony]. Nothing beyond this is immediately incumbent upon him, evidenced by the fact that, were he to die thereafter, he would die in obeisance to God—be He powerful, sublime—without [having been] disobedient to Him. However, other things are binding [upon him] by way of nonessential [duties] that appear. These³⁷ are not absolutely required of every individual in the strictest sense; indeed, the unbinding of these is conceivable [in certain situations and circumstances]. These “nonessential” [duties] lie either in action, in renunciation, or in conviction.³⁸

Al-Ghazālī then goes on to explain the additional duties of purification, ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage: the actions required of Muslims in most circumstances. After these, he briefly addresses the required renunciation of prohibited acts and substances, some of which are considered within the particular *Sitz im Leben* of the individual in question. He says, for example, “it is not obligatory for a blind man to learn what is prohibited [in relation to] vision.”³⁹ Here he opens wide the door of introspection and leaves each and every reader with the question of his or her own inner state (*hāl*), his own strengths and its weaknesses, the healthy regions of his soul and the sick places in need of special care. The knowledge of what must be renounced becomes, then, at least in part, a fruit of self-knowledge, wherein lies also the key for the proper remedy.

Other types of renunciation are universally relevant to all Muslims everywhere and thus necessary for everyone to know and follow. His

³⁶ Literally, “what was necessary [at] the moment (*wājib al-waqt*)”. According to al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, *al-waqt* refers to the temporal “space” spanning the anticipation of an event and its actual occurrence. In broader terms, it refers to the eternal present in which the mystics seek to be absorbed at all times. See *Early Islamic Mysticism*, Michael Sells, trans. and ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 99–102.

³⁷ Literally, “That (*dhālika*) is not absolutely . . .”

³⁸ *Al-‘ilm*, 23–4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

examples of this universally-required knowledge include the prohibition (for men) of wearing silk, the prohibition of wrongfully and forcibly seizing the property of others, and the prohibition of gazing upon females who are not close relatives or the members of one's household.

He then devotes the last three paragraphs in this chapter to the ordinary requirements of belief. Worthy of note in these final paragraphs is the emphasis he places on belief and self-awareness as safeguards against the intellectual perils of heretical ideas and practices. Explaining that the right convictions and actions of the heart have to do with the notions and inclinations of the individual, he says,

As for "the right convictions" (*al-ṣūqādāt*) and "the actions of the heart" (*a'māl al-qulūb*), knowledge of them is required according to the notions [that occur to each person]. If [for example] some doubt concerning the two phrases of the Testimony of Faith occurs to him, then he must learn that which will bring him to the cessation of the doubt. If that does not occur to him and he dies before believing that the Speech of God is eternal, that He is [in the Hereafter] visible, and that He is not a receptacle [for] created events, then he still dies a Muslim according to the unanimous consensus [of the learned]. Yet some of these notions required for the [correct] beliefs occur naturally and others occur [when one] hears them from the people of [his] town. For, if the [craft of] *kalām* has become widespread in the town and the people are discussing heretical ideas with one another, then he ought—from his very first encounter with them [i.e., the heretical ideas]—to be protected from it through the [authoritative] instruction of the truth. For, if falsehood is thrown at him then its elimination from his heart becomes necessary, and that may be difficult [to accomplish].⁴⁰

This touches on several points that will prove significant in the ensuing discussion. The first of these is an illustration of the dangers of *kalām*, which he will argue here and in many other places is extremely harmful to the public at large. At the same time, however, we have an illustration of the benefit that very same science can bring to the community: namely, the eradication of such heretical ideas that infect individuals and communities. Such "medicinal" uses of the *kalām* should be administered on a need-to-know basis, he explains, and depend entirely upon the situation at hand. Much more will be said about this in the ensuing discussion.

Unlike the somewhat volatile science of *kalām*, not all of the basic convictions are on a need to know basis, however, for al-Ghazālī

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24–5.

makes it quite clear that there are some beliefs that are absolutely necessary for everyone.

If the rule is that the human being does not [easily] detach himself from the incitements [to] evil, hypocrisy, and envy, then it is incumbent upon him to learn whatever he has need for from the quarter [of this work devoted to] the mortal vices. How would it not be binding upon him when the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “[there are] three mortal vices: greed that is obeyed; desirous inclinations that are followed; and conceit.” And from these no human being is exempt. The rest of what we shall say regarding the blameworthy aspects of the heart’s stations, such as haughtiness, conceit and their sisters, follow from these three mortal vices [mentioned in the Ḥadīth tradition]. Their extermination is an obligation for everyone, and this can only happen through an understanding of their definitions⁴¹ and causes, [as well as] a knowledge of their characteristic symptoms and cures. For he who does not know evil will fall into it, and the remedy lies in encountering the cause [that gives rise to] its opposite. So how is [this] possible without the knowledge of the cause and the effect? The majority of what we say in the section [on] mortal vices [in this work] is a binding obligation for everyone.⁴²

He ends this section by recapping and explaining that what “he [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) meant by (the) knowledge, made definite by the [letters] *alif* (ا) and *lām* (ل)⁴³ in his statement, ‘the pursuit of (the) knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim,’ is none other than the [practicable] knowledge of the action[s] widely known to be binding upon Muslims”.⁴⁴ Thus, al-Ghazālī’s position on this question incorporates Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s view (the knowledge relating to the performance of the five pillars) and expands the scope of right praxis to include some aspects of renunciation, doctrinal conviction, and spiritual formation. Taken all together, these are called by him “the knowledge of works” (*ilm al-ʿamal*).

The remainder of the religious sciences fall into the category of *farḍ kifāya*, i.e. essential for the health and welfare of the wider community but in no way binding upon the individual, whose obliga-

⁴¹ Literally, “their limits (*ḥudūd*)”, referring to the parameters by which each is defined.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴³ When taken together in this order, these two letters form the Arabic definite article.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

tory duties are discussed above. This is where we find al-Ghazālī's classification of the religious sciences, for he says,

know that the only way for the binding obligation to be distinguished from all else is through the mentioning of the classification⁴⁵ of the sciences. And, in addition to the obligatory [knowledge] that we have before us, the sciences divide into the religious (*shar'īya*) and the non-religious [sciences]. By the religious [sciences] I mean whatever benefit is derived from the prophets (may God's prayers and salvation be upon them). The intellect [alone] does not guide [one] to it, as it does in the case of [the science of] mathematics, nor does practical experience [guide one to it], as it does in the case of medicine; nor does [knowledge of] accepted usage (*al-samā'*) [point to it] as it does [in the case of] language.

The non-religious sciences divide into what is praiseworthy, what is blameworthy, and what is permissible. The praiseworthy is that which is tied to the betterment of worldly matters, such as medicine and mathematics, and these then further divide into that which is a requirement for [the welfare of] the community and into that which, though not being required, is still a virtue.⁴⁶

Al-Ghazālī continues to explain how many non-religious sciences, such as medicine, mathematics, [medicinal] cupping, farming, weaving, sewing, politics, etc., can still be considered to be absolutely necessary to the health and welfare of the community: "For if the polity were ever without a cupper, then destruction would rush upon them, and their souls would suffer anguish at the allusion of [impending] destruction . . ." Such is the case with all of the *fard kifāya* sciences, without which a society cannot survive.

According to al-Ghazālī, the religious sciences in this category divide into four categories: the Foundations (*al-uṣūl*), the Branches (*al-furū'*), the Preliminaries (*al-muqaddimāt*), and the Complementary Sciences (*al-mutamimmāt*).⁴⁷ Each will be discussed in turn. Although all of these are considered to be religious (*shar'ī*) in some way, most nevertheless have to do with the betterment of the health and welfare

⁴⁵ Literally, "the divisions of the sciences" (*aqsām al-'ulūm*).

⁴⁶ *Al-'ilm*, 25–6.

⁴⁷ Literally, this final division reads "the completing [sciences]"—*mutammim* being the active participle of the second form of the transitive verb *tammama*, which means to make (s.th.) whole, complete, or perfect. When we see the disciplines he includes in this category, it becomes evident that what is meant here are those sciences that are actually comprised of many disciplines or subspecies that work together in order to "complete" the science.

of worldly matters, as is the case with jurisprudence. On this al-Ghazālī is clear. He is also quite explicit about the fact that the general awareness of what is religious *vis a vis* what is not religious has eroded to such an extent that many have been duped into believing that some blameworthy sciences actually belong within the camp of the true and praiseworthy religious sciences. “As for the [true] religious sciences,” he writes, “they are all pointed toward explication and are all praiseworthy.” However, he interjects, because some sciences, deeming themselves religious when they were actually blameworthy, took on the garb of religious sciences,⁴⁸ people came to view some non religious sciences in a religious light. For this reason, he continues his analysis with qualified caution: the disciplines that are commonly regarded as the religious sciences divide into the praiseworthy and the blameworthy.⁴⁹

The praiseworthy religious sciences are presented in four divisions: the Foundations, the Branches, the Preliminaries, and the Complementary sciences. The Foundations include four main areas of knowledge:

the Book of God (be He mighty, sublime); the *sunna* of His Prophet (peace be upon him); the Consensus of the Community; and the Traditions of the Companions. The Consensus [of the community] is a foundation inasmuch as it points [back] to the *sunna*, and so it is a fundamental of the third order; so too is the Tradition [of the Companions], for it points [back] to the *sunna*. [This is] because the Companions (may God be pleased with them) witnessed the revelation and the [actual] sending down [of the Qur’ān] and because, through [their first-hand witnessing of] the factual evidence,⁵⁰ they comprehended the things⁵¹ whose eyewitness [experience] had eluded everyone else. Perhaps [these Qur’ānic] expressions do not [by themselves] encompass what is comprehended by way of [circumstantial] connections, and so it is from this perspective that the learned view the [virtues of] emulating them and adhering to their traditions and that [the learned] bear themselves humbly when in the presence of one who [actually] saw [the

⁴⁸ He clarifies this in reference to five distinct terms that have suffered equivocal usage (see *al-‘ilm*, 45–53). It may also apply to essentially blameworthy sciences that have come to play a religious role and are notorious for overstepping their bounds, as in the case of *kalām*, to which we will turn once we have examined the sciences that are authentically “religious” and thus essentially praiseworthy.

⁴⁹ See *al-‘ilm*, 26.

⁵⁰ Literally, “by reason of the interconnectedness of circumstances”.

⁵¹ Literally, “whatever . . .”

circumstances], [all this being] in accordance with a qualified condition and a particular perspective.⁵²

As for the Branches, al-Ghazālī explains that they are basically

whatever is understood from these Foundations, not on the basis of their [literal] expressions, but rather by way of the [signified] meanings to which the intellects point and by reason of which the understanding expands to the extent that it ascertains from the expression [that] what is being uttered is [actually] something else. [This is] just like what is understood from the statement of [the Prophet] (peace be upon him), “the judge should not judge when he is angry,” [in other words] that he should not judge when he is under stress⁵³ or hungry or suffering an illness.

This [second division]⁵⁴ is of two kinds. The first [kind] is connected to the betterment of the affairs of the world (*maṣāliḥ al-dunyā*) and is treated in the books of jurisprudence. The scholars specializing in jurisprudence, who are the “learned of the world”, are [thus] responsible for it. The second [kind] is connected to the affairs of the Afterlife; it is the science of the states of the heart, of the praiseworthy and blameworthy character traits, of [all] that is pleasing from God’s vantage point, be He exalted, and of whatever is repugnant [in His sight]. It is that which the latter part of this book—I mean [the whole] *Ihyā’ ulūm al-dīn*—contains. And part of it is the knowledge of what the heart appoints for the limbs by way of their acts of worship and their habitual actions. It is that which the first half of this book contains.⁵⁵

The Preliminaries, he then explains, are not religious sciences *per se*; rather they are tools necessary for unlocking the meanings of the Qur’ān and the *sunna*. Such is the case with the disciplines of language and grammar, about which he says,

language and grammar in themselves are not [properly counted] among the religious sciences, but [one’s] immersion in them is made necessary by reason of the Revelation (*al-shar‘*), since this Religious Law (*al-sharī‘a*) came [to humanity] in the language of the Arabs. Besides, each and every religious law only became manifest through language, and so the learning of that language became a tool [for each religious community].⁵⁶

The arts of composition and calligraphy, he says, were not originally required in the early days of the faith, when all instruction relied

⁵² *Al-‘ilm*, 26.

⁵³ Literally, “when he is holding back, repressing (s.th.)”.

⁵⁴ I.e., the second division of the religious sciences: the Branches.

⁵⁵ *Al-‘ilm*, 26–7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

upon a perfectly preserved oral tradition, but later became necessary due to human weakness and deficiency. In this way, he shows some flexibility in his categorization of the religious sciences: as the needs of the community change, things that were once unnecessary become essential to the health of the community,⁵⁷ and so they must be added to the ranks of essential religious sciences.

As was mentioned earlier, the Complementary Sciences are all religious “supersciences” in that bring many other disciplines into their service. One such superscience that he discusses is the Science of the Qur’ān,

for it divides into whatever is connected to [linguistic] expression (such as learning the [various] readings and phonetics)⁵⁸ and into whatever is connected to meaning (such as exegesis), and it even relies upon [oral] transmission as well, since language alone does not possess it [i.e., the Science of the Qur’ān]. [It also divides] into whatever relates to its [i.e., the Qur’ān’s] legal rulings (*bi-ahkāmihī*), such as the science of abrogation (*al-nāsikh wa’l-mansūkh*),⁵⁹ of the general and the particular, of the literal text and the manifest [meaning], and the manner of using part of it [to interpret another] part. [The knowledge of the Qur’ān’s] rulings is the knowledge that is called “the Foundations of Jurisprudence” (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and it treats the *sunna* as well.⁶⁰

A second superscience that he mentions concerns the knowledge of the Traditions and the Reports, which is also a composite of many disciplines, some of which break down even further into subdisciplines.

These then are the true religious sciences, he says, all of which are praiseworthy and all of which are considered *farḍ kifāya*. This does not mean, however, that all of these sciences can be considered otherworldly; on the contrary, he says, Islam—as a religion—deals with both this world and the next, and thus a great part of its religious sciences is exclusively oriented toward the sphere of the mundane. Likewise, the masters of such sciences, although engaged in religious scholarship, are considered masters of the mundane sciences. In strong terms but without haughty airs, al-Ghazālī explains this simply and clearly as he continues:

If you were to ask, “for what reason do you tie [the science of] jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*) to the knowledge of the world and the jurists [them-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Literally, the “pronunciation of the letters”.

⁵⁹ Literally, “that which abrogates and that which is abrogated”.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

selves] to the learned of the world?" [I answer] then know that God—be He mighty, sublime—brought Adam forth from the earth (*min al-turāb*) and brought forth his progeny from a line [fashioned] out of clay and gushing water. He then extracted them from the loins [of men] and [put them] into the wombs [of women], and from there into the world, then into the grave, then into the Day of Judgement (*al-'ard*), and then into [either] Paradise or the Fire. So this is their beginning place and that⁶¹ is their ultimate [destination]. And these are their stopping places.

[God] created the world as a provision for the Return, so that from it one might take whatever would be appropriate for getting equipped. If they had used [their provisions] justly, then the quarrels would have ceased and the jurists would have become unemployed. However, they took them with lustful desires from which the quarrels came into being. Thus the circumstances require a *ṣultān*⁶² to govern them, and the *ṣultān* stands in need of a law by which to govern them.

And so the jurisprudent is the one learned in the law of [political] management and in the way of mediation between people since they are [always] struggling against one another by virtue of [their] greedy desires. Thus the jurist is the teacher of the *ṣultān* and his guide in the way of the [political] management of people and [in the way of] controlling them, so that he might order their affairs in the world through [steering] them in the correct way.

By my life! [the jurist] is also connected with religion, but not directly,⁶³ rather, [he is connected with religion] through the medium of the world. For [this] world is the seed-ground of the next world,⁶⁴ and religion cannot be perfected until [it is made perfect] in the world.⁶⁵

Again, on the very next page, he makes it very clear that the authority of the jurist extends only to the borders of this world and no further.

Know then that the closest *the jurist comes to discussing*⁶⁶ the acts which are the acts of the Afterlife is [his discussion of] three [things]: Islam,

⁶¹ Literally, "this . . ."

⁶² While this can denote "authority" in a general sense, it can also signify the individual who wields the political authority in a community. It is in this latter sense, I think, that al-Ghazālī is using the term here, and for that reason I leave it in the transliterated original.

⁶³ Literally, "not in itself . . ."

⁶⁴ Literally, "the Afterlife/Hereafter".

⁶⁵ *Al-'ilm*, 27.

⁶⁶ Here the italicized text indicates my somewhat loose paraphrasing of the original text, which literally reads, "the closest [thing] about which the jurist speaks to the acts which are the acts of the afterlife . . ." or, more idiomatically, "[regarding] that about which the jurist speaks, the closest [thing] to the acts which are the acts of the afterlife is . . ."

[ritual] prayer, [obligatory] almsgiving, and the permitted and prohibited [things].⁶⁷ If you consider [the] highest degree investigated [by] the jurist, then you will know that he does not go beyond the limits of the world into the Hereafter. And if you know this about these three [aspects of the religion], then it is, in other [aspects], [even] clearer.

As for Islam, the jurist speaks of that by which one becomes faultless [in practice] and of that [by which] one becomes corrupted [in word and deed]. [He also speaks of] the conditions for [both cases]. He only pays attention to the tongue; as for the heart, it is outside the jurisdiction of the jurist, due to the fact that the Prophet (may God grant him peace and salvation) removed the masters of swords and worldly authority from [matters concerning the heart] when he said, “did you split open his heart . . .?” to the one who had killed the man uttering the testimony of Islam on the excuse that [the man] had said that out of fear of the sword. Indeed, the jurist judges the soundness of Islam beneath the shadow of the sword, even though he knows that the sword did not reveal to him the intention of [the man], nor did it remove the veil of ignorance and confusion from him. However, [the jurist] is the advisor of the soldier. If the sword is extended to [a man’s] neck and the hand is extended to [grasp] his property, this word [uttered] by the tongue safeguards [the man’s] neck and property as long as he has a neck and property. For that reason, [the Prophet] (may God’s blessings and prayers be upon him) said, “I was commanded to fight the people until they say ‘There is no god but God’. If they say it, their blood and property are safeguarded from me.” He thus made that [rule] pertain to blood and property. As for the Afterlife, possessions do not benefit one there; rather, the lights of the hearts, along with their secrets and purity [benefit people in the Hereafter]. That is not a part of the art of jurisprudence. If the jurist plunges into [such matters], it is just as if he had plunged into the [science of] *kalām* or medicine. He has gone beyond [the bounds of] his art.

As for prayer, the jurist is entitled to offer a legal opinion regarding the soundness [of the prayer’s performance], whether one executes [it] according to the form of the actions in accordance with the external conditions, even when [the worshipper] is unmindful of his entire prayer from its beginning to its end, save for the initial *takbīr*, being [rather] occupied with thoughts about accounting for his transactions in the marketplace. This prayer offers no benefit in the Hereafter, just as the statement by the person concerning [his acceptance of] Islam offers no benefit. Still, the jurist can give a legal ruling concerning its soundness, i.e., whether what [the worshipper] did had followed the external form of the matter and had thus put off [the punishments

⁶⁷ It is curious to note that there are actually four things listed here and treated in the ensuing text. Perhaps this is a scriptural error in the manuscript.

of] execution and reprimand. As for the humble disposition of the heart [in prayer] and the causing of the heart to be in full attendance [during prayer], which are acts of the Afterlife, acts through which the external act is made beneficial, the jurist does not meddle in [these matters]. If he were to meddle in [these matters], it would be outside of his art . . .⁶⁸

The jurist then is clearly one of the “learned of the world,” but this in no way means that the science of which he is a master is not one of the essential religious sciences. On the contrary al-Ghazālī argues that jurisprudence is crucial to the spiritual formation of individuals and communities, albeit in a this-worldly, action-oriented way. And, because one’s present life in this world is so intimately tied to one’s future life in the next world, there are moments when the work of the jurist bears on or even overlaps the work of masters whose expertise is the knowledge of the Way of the Afterlife.

The science of jurisprudence borders on the Science of the Way of the Afterlife because it investigates bodily actions, whose source and founding principle [reside in] the attributes of the hearts [from which they spring]. So the praiseworthy acts originate from the praiseworthy character traits [that] save [one] in the Afterlife, and the blameworthy [acts] originate from the blameworthy [character traits]. The connection of the [outer] bodily extremities to the heart is not hidden.⁶⁹

This, however, does not award the jurist a place among the doctors of the Afterlife, for the domain of his authority is clearly demarcated by al-Ghazālī. The jurist’s expounding on topics outside of his expertise is regarded as something of a breach of both good sense and good manners.

All of the speculation of the jurist is tied to the world, [the arena] in which the piety of the Way of the Afterlife [is lived out]. If he speaks about anything concerning the attributes of the heart and the judgments of the next world, then in his discourse he involves himself in something along the lines of [an impolite] intrusion, just as if something of [the sciences of] Medicine or Mathematics or Astronomy or the science of *kalām* had entered into his discourse. . . .⁷⁰

If the jurist’s authority is confined to this world, then what of the dogmatic theologian’s? Much to the surprise of many readers, both

⁶⁸ *Al-‘ilm*, 28–29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

medieval and modern, al-Ghazālī is even more heavy-handed when dealing with the science of the *kalām*, much of which he regards as being extraneous to religion.

Know that the sum total of what [the science of] *kalām* covers by way of the proofs from which one can derive benefit is [already] covered by the Qurʾān and the Reports [of the Prophetic Custom]. Whatever [proofs] go beyond these two [sources] are either [i] blameworthy argumentation (which [belongs] among the [heretical] innovations, as its explication will show) or [ii] quarrel[s] connected to [one of] the mutually conflicting [doctrines] of the sects or [iii] long-windedness [in] conveying the statements (*maqālāt*) [of the sects],⁷¹ (most of which are shams and senseless ravings disdained by [people's good] natures and spat out upon [people's] hearing [them]). Some of it is a plunging into [topics] that are in no way connected to the religion; none of it was familiar during the first era [of Islam], and the [very act of] immersing [onself] in it was, in its entirety, [understood to be something] of a [heretical] innovation.⁷²

Thus, from a purely traditional point of view, much of what is regarded as the religious science of the *kalām* has no business calling itself a religious science or even deeming itself beneficial or praiseworthy. More, the aspects that are authentically religious in character are borrowed from the sciences of the Book and the *sunna*. In short, he seems to suggest that there effectively is no *religious* science of *kalām*, in spite of the prevailing attitudes of his time.

However, al-Ghazālī goes on to explain that, over time, the emergence of new socio-religious problems cleared a legitimate place for the argumentative craft of *kalām* in the religious life of the community. He continues,

Now, however, its [original] jurisdiction (*ḥukmuhu*) has changed since innovations have sprung up which turn away from the requirements⁷³ [imposed by] the Qurʾān and the *sunna*. And there has come to the fore a group [of innovators] who have fabricated something in the likeness [of the Qurʾān and the *sunna*], in which they have arranged a [well] composed discourse. Thus that [science formerly] warranting caution became a permissible thing by virtue of necessity; indeed, it

⁷¹ It seems that he has in mind here the lengthy and detailed heresiographical texts, such as al-Ashʿarī's famous *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*.

⁷² Ibid., 33. For more detailed criticism of *kalām* gone wrong, see *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr (Ihyāʾ*, vol. IV), 208.

⁷³ Literally, "the requisite of . . ." or "that which is required [by] . . ."

became one of the communal obligations,⁷⁴ and [the obligation] is the extent to which the innovator is confronted when he is set on inciting [others] to the [heretical] innovation. And that is to a fixed limit which we shall mention in the section following this one, God willing . . .

So let the theologian know his limit [imposed] from the religion, and [let him know] that his place is the place of a guard on the pilgrims' road (*tarīq al-ḥajj*). If the guard confines himself to [the responsibility of] standing guard, then he does not [properly] belong among the pilgrims. [Similarly] the theologian, if he confines himself to [the tasks of] disputing and defending and does not follow the way of the afterlife nor occupy himself with the maintainance of the heart and its righteousness, then he essentially has no place among the learned of the religion.⁷⁵

The dogmatic theologian's parameters, then, are very narrowly defined, and al-Ghazālī makes it very clear that the *kalām* is utterly inappropriate for anything other than this single purpose—disputing heretical innovations and defending the creed of the religion. And this is nothing to be overly proud of, he says, at least not in terms of intellectual or religious pride, for theology never raises its practitioners beyond the level of the masses.

Of religion, the theologian has nothing save the creed that he shares with the rest of the common people, [the] creed which belongs to the actions external to the heart and the tongue. He only is distinguished from the common person through the craft of argumentation and protection.

As for the [servant's] gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God—be He exalted—and His attributes and acts and all to which we point in the knowledge of the Unveiling, it is not attainable through the science of *kalām*. On the contrary, *al-kalām* is almost a veil [draped] over it and a barrier [keeping one] away from it. Rather its attainment is by way of concerted striving [in the way of God] which God—be He magnified—has made a preliminary to guidance inasmuch as He—be He exalted—said, “and those who strive for Us, We will surely guide them in Our ways. Surely God is with those who work righteousness” [29:69].⁷⁶

Now, while these statements seem to relegate the science or craft of the *kalām* to the lowest common denominator when it comes to religious understanding, other texts are a little less harsh. For example, in the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* (the Commentary on the Wonders of

⁷⁴ This is corroborated in the *Kitāb qawā'id al-'aqa'id (Iḥyā'*, vol. I), 129.

⁷⁵ *Al-'ilm*, 33–4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

the Heart), he grants a *slightly* more estimable rank to the *mutakallim*, who is placed between the level of the common person and the mystic knower when it comes to their respective levels of faith.⁷⁷ Even in this most favorable of contexts, however, the practitioner of the *kalām* must still accept a rank that is considerably inferior to that of one endowed with real understanding.

As is becoming clear, for al-Ghazālī, every science has its scope and its limit, and the demarcation of these limits is nowhere more crucial than in the field of religion. From his introduction to the *Ihyāʾ* and from the tone of these texts taken from the *Book of Knowledge*, the reader senses his grave concern regarding the popular confusion over the types of religious and spiritual authority wielded by the various kinds of religious intelligentsia. It should be emphasized that al-Ghazālī is not down on the jurisprudential sciences and the *kalām*; he is rather seeking to put each in its proper place. However, the common conceptions of these sciences have become so muddled and have strayed so far from where they should be (in his view) that his “restoration” of the proper ranking of the religious sciences seems to be doing dishonor to the practitioners of these sciences, namely the jurists and the theologians.

When faced with the objection that the jurists and the theologians are the most widely renowned of religious scholars and when asked how he dare relegate them and their sciences to such humble ranks among the religious sciences, he cuts to the very heart of these misconceptions by challenging the criteria by which such scholars are judged to be great.

Know that whosoever comes to know the Truth by way of men has become perplexed in the labrynth of error. Know the Truth, and then you will know its folk if you [yourself] are walking the way of Truth. If it is enough for you to accept [faith] on [the] authority [of your forbears] and to investigate whatever has become well-known concerning the degrees of virtue among the people, then do not neglect the Companions and the sublimity of their rank. Those to whom I have [already] called attention⁷⁸ unanimously agree on their [the Companions'] precedence⁷⁹ and [they agree] that their supreme position in

⁷⁷ *Ihyāʾ*, vol. III, 128–9.

⁷⁸ Literally, “those whose mentioning I have [already] indicated” (*alladhīn ‘arraḍtuhu bi-dhukrihim*). This seems to refer to all of the various kinds of religious scholars mentioned thus far in the text, including the jurists and theologians.

⁷⁹ This precedence or priority (*taqaddum*) carries both a temporal and a moral nuance.

the religion cannot be grasped, nor can they be surpassed [by anyone]. And their precedence is not in the *kalām* nor in Jurisprudence; rather, [it is] in the knowledge of the afterlife and the manner of walking its path.⁸⁰

One of the blameworthy ways in which the science of *kalām* has overstepped its bounds is in its investigation of the divine mysteries (*al-asrār al-ilāhīya*), a task for which it is entirely unsuited. He speaks of this in many texts, both within and without the *Ihyā'*, and, in the *Book of Knowledge*, the discussion falls under the section, "explicating the reason [for] the reproach of the blameworthy science (*bayān 'illa(t) dhamm al-'ilm al-madhmūm*)". Here, he explains that "knowledge is not blamed for itself; rather it is blamed in reference to the servants (*fi ḥaqq al-'ibād*) for one of three reasons." The first of these is that "it leads to some [kind of] harm, either to its patron or to someone else, as [is the case with] what is blameworthy for magic and fortune telling (*al-ṭalmīsāt*)." He takes this very seriously, saying that such magic can, among other things, break up marriages.⁸¹ The second reason is "that the greater part of it could be harmful to its patron," such as is the case with astrology (*'ilm al-nujūm*), which can lead to star worship.⁸² In the third of the three reasons given, he explains that a science or pseudo science is blameworthy when one mistakenly

plunges into a science from which one cannot derive the [proper] benefit of a science.⁸³ So it is blameworthy in its own right (*fi ḥaqqihi*), just like studying the fine point[s] of the sciences before [learning] their main point[s] and [seeking] their hidden [natures] before their manifest [natures], or⁸⁴ like searching for the divine mysteries, as the philosophers and theologians look for them without having [truly] mastered⁸⁵ them. Indeed, only the prophets and the *awliyā'* have acquired [the knowledge of the divine mysteries]. Hence, it is necessary to keep people from searching for them and to return them to that which the Religious Law utters; that is sufficient for the the fortunate [person]. How many an individual who plunged into the sciences was injured

⁸⁰ *Al-'ilm*, 34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸³ Literally, "plunging into a science from which one [literally, 'the one plunging into it'] does not derive the benefit of a science . . ." For the sake of readability, I have slightly abridged the Arabic.

⁸⁴ Literally, "and . . ." I have inserted the disjunction for English readability.

⁸⁵ Literally, "without having possessed them" (*lam yastaqillu bihā*). Here, I suggest "mastered" in the sense of appropriation.

by them? Had he not plunged into [these sciences] his spiritual condition would have been better than that which it became.⁸⁶

The clear implication here is that the philosophers and theologians have done harm to themselves and possibly to others by failing to recognize the limits of their respective sciences. And there is an implicit warning to these and other scholars: leave the divine mysteries to the saints and the prophets, who alone are capable and qualified to master this dangerous sphere of knowledge.

All other sciences having been ruled out, then, the single science by which these mysteries may be known is that belonging to the *awḥiyā'* and the prophets: namely, the science of the Way of the Afterlife. This time, however, we look not to its practical, praxis-oriented side (the science of Right Practice) but rather to its theoretical or speculative side, which is called the science of the Unveiling. He refers to this noetic side of the science of the Way of the Afterlife in many places throughout the *Book of Knowledge*.

The divisions of that by which [the servant] draws nigh unto God—be He exalted—are three: sheer knowledge, which is the knowledge of the Unveiling; sheer action, such as the justice of the *ṣultān*, for example, and his controlling [his subjects] for [the welfare of] the people; and the composite of knowledge and action, which is the science of the Way of the Afterlife.⁸⁷

Near the end of his introduction to the *Iḥyā'*, he provides us with some additional detail regarding this mystical way of knowing, again in the context of its praxis-oriented sister, the science of Right Practice.

... the science by which one is turned toward the afterlife divides into the science of Right Practice and the science of the Unveiling. By the science of the Unveiling I mean whatever is sought exclusively [for the purpose of] revealing (*kashf*) the object of knowledge, and by the science of Right Practice I mean whatever is sought with [reference to] works⁸⁸ in the accompaniment of *kashf*.⁸⁹ The goal of this book [i.e.

⁸⁶ *Al-ʿilm*, 43. See also *Kitāb qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid*, 127–8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁸ Literally, “the act” or “acting” (*al-ʿamal*).

⁸⁹ As will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, the science of Right Practice and the science of the Unveiling coexist in an interdependent fashion; here, he makes reference to the fact that some aspects of practice cannot be fully understood and properly performed without some limited knowledge of the Unveiling. This is a point that he makes more explicitly in the *Kitāb al-tawḥīd waʾl-tawakkul (Iḥyāʾ)*, vol. V). See below.

the entire *Ihyā'* is the science of Right Practice only, without the science of the Unveiling, for which there is no licence [giving permission] for putting it [in] books, even though it is the ultimate goal of seekers, the [ultimate] desire of the eyes of the righteous. And the science of Right Practice is the way to it.

However, the prophets (may the prayers of God be upon them) have only spoken with humanity about the knowledge of the way and the [right] guidance to it. As for the knowledge of the Unveiling, they never spoke of it save through symbol (*ramz*)⁹⁰ and [indicative] gesture[s] by way of example and [brief] summarization: a [kind of] knowledge on their part of the inability of people's understandings to bear [the Unveiling]. Now the learned are the heirs of the prophets, and [so] they do not have any means of turning away from the path of consoling [the people] and emulating [the prophets].⁹¹

So, even though he touches on the knowledge of the Unveiling in this and many other parts of the *Ihyā'*, he tells us in no uncertain terms that the work itself is about the knowledge of Right Practice—which is for everyone—and not about the disclosure of the contents of mystical noesis—which is beyond most people's ability to bear and is in no way a requirement for salvation. Indeed, it is enough for al-Ghazālī that people grasp and believe in the symbols and summaries provided by the prophets, who are uniquely equipped to clothe this higher knowledge in a symbolic garb that is lifegiving and useful for the whole of humankind. Much more will be said about this below.

The place of “the learned” in this two-tiered hierarchy seems ambiguous, however. The term itself is highly equivocal, but, in the context of the passage cited above, it seems to refer to that group referred to elsewhere as the “learned of the Afterlife”,⁹² who are initiated both in the way of mystical noesis and in the practical path of getting there. Such are the learned who together make up the legacy left behind by the prophets. As will become increasingly clear in the course of this chapter, such individuals, while having access to the higher or more authentic meanings signified by the prophetic symbols, are forever bound to uphold the prophetic restraint concerning the disclosure of the raw content of the Unveiling. This is

⁹⁰ As stated above, the word *ramz*, translated here as “symbol”, carries the nuance of “puzzle” and “ruse” in addition to indirect signification.

⁹¹ From the Introduction (*al-muqaddima*), 10. See also *supra*, 5.

⁹² In the Introduction, I refer to this class as the “doctors of the afterlife” rather than “the learned”. Both renderings represent the same Arabic plural, *'ulamā'*.

due to the unchanging fact that most people's understandings simply cannot bear such content. This theme will surface and resurface again and again in the course of the *Ihyā'* and will be examined in greater detail in the following pages.

So what exactly is this noesis of the Unveiling about which the gnostic is bound to keep silent? In the *Book of Knowledge*, al-Ghazālī writes,

... it is the knowledge of the inner [truth], and that is the apex of the sciences. Some of the gnostics⁹³ have said, "[as for] him who does not have a share of this knowledge, I fear for him the evil of the end (*sū' al-khātima*). And [the] least share of it is believing in it and leaving it to its [own] folk (*li-ahlīhi*)." Another said, "if one has within him [either of] two traits—innovation or haughtiness—then nothing of this science will be opened to him." And it is said, "whoever is enamoured with the world or persistent in [following] lustful desire will not ascertain [this science], although he can ascertain the rest of the sciences. The least punishment for the one who denies it is that he will experience⁹⁴ nothing of [the Unveiling]." In accordance with [this] statement, it is recited, "Be content with the one whose absence escaped you, for that is the punishment built-in to the sin."⁹⁵

It is the knowledge of the truthful and those who are near [to God]: I mean the knowledge of the Unveiling, which is an expression for a light that appears in the heart upon its purification and cleansing from its blameworthy characteristics. From that light many things are unveiled, [things] whose names have been heard before and for which many general meanings are imagined, [meanings which] are not clear. They then become clear so that the true gnosis is attained [regarding] the true essence of God, be He exalted, His enduring and perfect attributes, His acts and His wisdom in creating [this] world and the Hereafter, and the mode (*wajh*) of His assigning [a priority] to the Hereafter over [this] world. [Also attained is] the gnosis of the meaning of prophecy and the prophet, the meaning of revelation and the meaning of Satan, the meaning of the expression "angels" and "devils", the manner of the hostility [harbored by] the devils for the human being, the manner of the angel's appearance to the prophets, the manner [in which] revelation comes to them, the gnosis of the [realm of] the *malakūt* of the heavens and the earth, the gnosis of the heart, the manner [in which] the hosts of angels and the devils clash [against] one

⁹³ I use "gnostic" in the general sense denoting a master of mystical knowledge. The Arabic term is *'arīfīn* (genitive here), literally "knowers" in the esoteric sense.

⁹⁴ Literally, "he will not taste (*lā yadhūqu*) . . ."

⁹⁵ More literally, "that is a sin wherein is the punishment." The origin of this line is uncertain.

another in [the heart], the difference between the visit of the angel and the visit of Satan, the gnosis of the Hereafter, the garden and the fire, the torture of the grave, the bridge, the balance and the reckoning, and the meaning of the statement of [God], be He exalted, "Read your book; today your [own] soul is sufficient as an account against you" [*al-Isrā'* (17): 14] and the meaning of His saying, be He exalted, "Surely the abode of the Hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew" [*al-'Ankabūt* (29): 64]. [Also attained is] the meaning of the meeting with God, be He mighty, sublime, and the glancing upon His gracious face, the meaning of proximity unto Him and coming to dwell in His vicinity, the meaning of attaining felicity in the company of the highest concourse⁹⁶ (*al-malā' al-a'lā*) and in association with the angels and the prophets, the meaning of the different degrees [of rank] of the people of the [various] gardens [of Paradise] to the extent that some of them see others just as the pearly star is seen in the middle of the heaven, and [this goes] on to other things whose elaboration would go long due to the fact that, in relation to the meanings of these things, people have—beyond⁹⁷ [their common] belief in the foundations—various stations. Some of them think that all of these⁹⁸ are semblances (*amthila*) and that what God has prepared for His righteous servants is "that which no eye has seen nor ear heard nor has it occurred to any human heart." [They believe] that [the knowledge] concerning Paradise is not in the possession of people save [in the form of] attributes and names. Others think that some of [the Afterlife teachings] are similitudes and [that] some of them correspond with their realities [as] understood from their [linguistic] expressions; in this way some of them believe that the highest degree of the [servant's] gnosis of God is the recognition of the inability to [fully] comprehend⁹⁹ Him. Some of them claim enormities regarding [their] gnosis of God, be He mighty, sublime, and some of them say, "the limit [governing] the [servant's] gnosis of God, be He mighty, sublime, is the terminus of the dogmatic belief of all the common people: namely, that He is existent, knowing, [all] powerful, hearing, seeing, and speaking."

By the knowledge of the Unveiling, we mean that the covering is lifted so that the plain truth becomes clear in reference to these things. [This] coming of clarity is in the manner of the eyewitness experience

⁹⁶ "Concourse" is used here in the Middle English sense of assembly or throng. This is also true to the earlier Latin form, *concursum*, the past participle of *concurrere*, "to assemble".

⁹⁷ As the preposition *warā'* also indicates temporal priority here, it could also be rendered "after".

⁹⁸ Literally, "all of that".

⁹⁹ This is a verbal rendering of the term usually translated as "gnosis" in this study. In Arabic, sometimes the verbal noun carries verbal force, as it does here, and must be rendered in English as a verb. In either case, it refers to mystical noesis, which is both theoretical and experiential for al-Ghazālī.

about which there is no doubt.¹⁰⁰ This would be possible in the innermost part (*jawhar*)¹⁰¹ of the human person were it not for the accumulation of the rust and scum of worldly defilements on the mirror of the heart. And so, by the Science of the Way of the Afterlife, we mean the knowledge of how to polish this mirror [thus cleansing it] of these [various kinds of] filth, which are a veil [keeping one] from God—be He praised and exalted—and from the gnosis of His attributes and acts.

Its purification and cleansing is [accomplished] by means of abstaining from the lustful desires and [by means of] emulating the prophets in all of their states, may the prayers of God be upon them. For, to the extent that [these things] can be purged from the heart and to the extent that the heart comes close to the threshold of the Truth, His verities will glimmer within it. But there is no way to [get to this station] save through the [spiritual] discipline whose explication comes in its [own, rightful] place and through knowledge and instruction.¹⁰² These are the sciences which cannot be written down in books and of which nothing is spoken by the one upon whom God—be He exalted—has bestowed His blessings, except with his [own] folk (*maʿa ahlihi*),¹⁰³ who are those having a share in it.¹⁰⁴ [The communication of these sciences can occur both] by way of oral teaching (*mudhākara*) and by the way of secrets. That is the hidden knowledge, which [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) meant by his statement, “verily of knowledge there is [something] akin to the outer shape of the hidden thing; only the folk [possessing] the gnosis of God—be He exalted—know it. If they utter [something] of it, only

¹⁰⁰ In the original, this second sentence is actually an adverbial clause (*hāl*), modifying the manner in which “the plain truth becomes clear”. I have altered the structure for readability.

¹⁰¹ In the context of his *kalām* writings, al-Ghazālī—like all of the Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn* of his day and before—uses this term to denote “atom”. This is not likely to be his intention here, however, where the nature of the discussion is esoteric Unveiling rather than exoteric *kalām*, about which more is said in chapter two. Still, it is well worth noting here that he seems to equate the “heart” with this “*jawhar*” in this context. The profound significance of this equivalence will become clear as the study unfolds.

¹⁰² It is worth commenting that he does not mean education in the everyday sense of the term. Rather, he means formation, which is both moral and intellectual and can only come through a master who is both teacher and spiritual director. As is becoming clear, we must be wary of the ways in which ordinary lexical items are employed in this extraordinary context.

¹⁰³ This could also be rendered “its [own] folk”, i.e. the people who are naturally suited for and initiated in the ways of mysticism, which seems to be al-Ghazālī’s usual usage of *ahl* in conjunction with a possessive pronominal suffix.

¹⁰⁴ Literally, “he is the one who shares in it.” I render it in the plural because the pronoun “*huwa*” here refers to *ahl*, which is grammatically masculine and singular although its meaning is clearly plural.

those who are deluded about God—be He exalted—will [remain] ignorant of it. So do not scorn a learned man to whom God—be He exalted—has given [some] knowledge of it, for God—be He mighty, sublime—has not scorned him since to him He gave [the knowledge].¹⁰⁵

In the whole of the *Ihyā'*, this is one of the most candid and detailed passages regarding the nature and contents of this secret knowledge about which al-Ghazālī is constantly telling his reader he cannot speak. We have already witnessed one example of this in his introduction to the *Ihyā'*, specifically where he tells the reader that the knowledge of the Unveiling will not be found in the book: “there is no licence [giving permission] for putting it [in] books, even though it is the ultimate goal of the seekers, the [ultimate] desire of the eyes of the righteous . . .”¹⁰⁶

However, while seemingly careful to divulge none of the secrets of this hidden and well-guarded knowledge, he provides his reader with a tremendous amount of information—mostly in bits and pieces scattered throughout the books of the *Ihyā'*, and here in a large lump. Crucial to our investigation in the coming chapters is the outline of the contents of the *mukāshafa*, which includes the knowledge of the true nature of both the human heart and the Hereafter; more pertinent to our present discussion is his tantalizing disclosure of the ways in which this information is conveyed from one gnostic to another: either by means of oral instruction (*mudhākara*) from one's teacher or “by the way of secrets” (*bi-tarīq al-asrār*). Since an examination of private oral teaching from the twelfth century is obviously beyond our reach, it is to this latter mode that we must turn our attention.

If this concealed knowledge cannot be grasped by “those who are deluded about God—be He exalted” and can only be known by “the folk [possessing] the gnosis of God—be He exalted”, then it may be possible for this “secret communication” to occur within the public domain, for no one would be able to identify or decode the esoteric content save “its [own] folk”, i.e., the initiated gnostics and wayfarers walking the Way of the Afterlife. While seeming somewhat stretched and hypothetical at this point in the discussion, the phenomenon of secret communication was cited just a few pages

¹⁰⁵ *Al-'ilm*, 30–1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

above, where al-Ghazālī's Introduction to the *Ihyā'* was quoted to explain how the prophets and the saints transmit this knowledge: "through symbol and [indicative] gesture[s] by way of example and summarization". This mysterious mode of transmitting esoteric content becomes more and more decipherable as we probe the *Ihyā'* more thoroughly in what remains of this chapter and in the course of the subsequent chapters. For now it is both accurate and safe to state that, although we find no explicit disclosure of the substantive content of this hidden knowledge in the books of the *Ihyā'*, we find general descriptions of its transmission and allusions to its general contents everywhere.

Another such place is in the *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr* (the *Book Reproving [Self] Delusion*).¹⁰⁷ Here, following his four-part treatment of the various kinds of self delusion found among the classes of people, he explains that intellect, knowledge, and gnosis are the three things by means of which the servant can be delivered from the various kinds of self-deception. After discussing the meaning of intellect, he writes,

by gnosis (*al-ma'rifā*) I mean that [one] knows four things: he knows himself (*nafsahu*); he knows his Lord; he knows this world; and he knows the Hereafter. He knows himself through worship and abasement and through his being a stranger in this world and a foreigner to the animal desires. Indeed, the only thing[s] concordant with him in terms of [his] nature are the gnosis of God—be He exalted—and gazing upon His face. And it is inconceivable for one to know this without [first] knowing himself and his Lord.¹⁰⁸ Let him be aided in this by what we have mentioned in the Book of the Love [of God], the Book of the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart, the Book of Contemplation, and the Book of Thanksgiving, since there are in them allusions to the description of the soul and to the description of God's sublimity, [descriptions] by which he would be alerted to the general [meanings].¹⁰⁹ But the perfection of the gnosis [lies] beyond them.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Ihyā'*, vol. IV, 188–232.

¹⁰⁸ This is elaborated upon in his *Alchemy of Happiness*, where he devotes an entire chapter to the knowledge of self and another to the knowledge of God. The former opens with his statement that "knowledge of the self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: 'he who knows himself knows God,' and, as it is written in the Koran, "We will show them Our signs in the world and in themselves, that the truth may be manifest to them.'" See Claud Field trans. & Elton Daniel ed. and ann. (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 5 ff.

¹⁰⁹ Literally, "by [reason of] it, the alert (*al-tanabbuh*) arises, [calling attention] to the sum (*al-jumla*) . . ."

¹¹⁰ Literally, "beyond it". The pronominal suffix seems to be referring to the description (*wasf*) of these things.

For truly this is [part] of the sciences of the Unveiling, and we shall not go to great length [about] anything in this book except for the knowledge of Right Practice.

As for the gnosis of [the true nature of] this world and the Hereafter, regarding them one may seek assistance in what we have mentioned in the Book Reproving the World and the Book of the Remembrance of Death, so that it will become clear that the world has no comparable affinity¹¹¹ to the Hereafter. Thus, if he knows [the true natures of] himself, his Lord, this world and the next, there will arise from his heart the love of God by virtue of [his] gnosis of God; [and there will arise] a strong desire for [the Hereafter] by virtue of [his] gnosis of [the true nature of] the Hereafter; and, by virtue of [his] gnosis of the world, [there will arise] the revulsion for it; and whatever will deliver him to God—be He exalted—and will benefit him in the Hereafter, [these] become his most important concerns.

When this desire overwhelms his heart, his intention is set aright in reference to each and every thing. Thus, when he eats, for example, or when he is occupied with the call of nature,¹¹² his purpose in [doing] it is to gain assistance in following the Way of the Afterlife. His intention is set aright, and every deception whose basis lies in the mutual attraction of [selfish] inclinations and [in] the desire for the world, honor and wealth flees from him, for these¹¹³ are the corrupting agent[s] of the intention. And, as long as the world is dearer to him than the Hereafter and the lustful desires of his [lower] soul are dearer to him than God's satisfaction, be He exalted, then it is impossible for him to [find] deliverance from the [various kinds of] delusion.

When, by virtue of [his] gnosis of God and of himself, [the gnosis which] issues from the perfection of his intellect, the love of God overwhelms his heart, he stands in need of the third meaning, which is knowledge—I mean the knowledge of the gnosis of how to follow the way¹¹⁴ to God and the knowledge of that which will bring him nigh unto God and that which will distance him from Him; the knowledge of the dangers of the way, [along with] its hinderances and calamities.¹¹⁵

There are many significant elements in this passage. Very important is his clear affirmation that, while never divulging the contents of mystical gnosis to his reader, he has loaded the *Ihyā'* with descriptions

¹¹¹ Here I use two terms to cover the intention of *nisba*, which carries the inter-related ideas of relation, kinship/affinity, and comparison. "Comparable affinity" is the fullest and most apt English rendering in this context.

¹¹² This, of course is an idiomatic rendering of the Arabic, which reads, "the compliance with" or "carrying out of the [bodily] necessity (*qadā' al-hāja*)."

¹¹³ Literally, "that (*dhālika*)".

¹¹⁴ Literally, "the manner (*kayfiya*) of following the way . . ."

¹¹⁵ *Dhamm al-ghurūr*, 228.

and allusions designed to assist the seeker in his quest to attain it. He even tells the reader where to look: The *Book of the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart*, the *Book of Contemplation*, the *Book of [Forbearance and]*¹¹⁶ *Thanksgiving*, the *Book of Reproving the World*, and the *Book of the Remembrance of Death*. Most of these books will be given further attention as this study unfolds. If we look to works outside of the *Ihyā'*, such as his *Forty [Points] Concerning the Foundations of Faith* (*al-Araba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*) and the *Most Radiant Aim in Commenting on the Most Beautiful Names of God* (*al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*), we find that he refers the esoterically-oriented reader to these and other books within the *Ihyā'* for more detailed treatments of esoteric topics.¹¹⁷ Other *Ihyā'* texts mentioned in these two works include the *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr*, the *Book of Affirming Divine Unity and Relying [upon God]* (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*), and the *Book of Love, Yearning, [Intimate Friendship,] and Contentment* (*Kitāb al-maḥabba wa'l-shawq [wa'l-uns] wa'l-riḍā*). Most of these will play active roles in our substantive investigation of the human heart.

Returning to our commentary on the passage cited above, he explains that this secret knowledge will reveal to the wayfarer his own true nature, the true nature of God, the reality of this world and the true nature of the next, topics whose true natures are apparently unknown to the ordinary person through the ordinary religious teachings. But he also makes it quite clear that this knowledge comes by way of a holistic and systematic formation rather than by way of the simple disclosure of information, and the fountainhead of the entire process is “that the love of God overwhelms the heart and the love of the world falls away from it, so that, through [this], the will becomes strong and the intention is set aright. And that is only attainable through the gnosis [of the self, of God, of this world and the next] that we have mentioned.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Sometimes, when referring to his own writings, al-Ghazālī uses a short form of their full titles, perhaps showing that the official titles—as recorded in his introduction to the *Ihyā'*—were finalized after the entire project was finished. These “short-form” titles thus may have been working titles in his mind while he was still composing the multivolume work.

¹¹⁷ See Lazarus Yafeh's collation of these texts in her *Studies in al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), 370–373. While we do not always agree with her interpretations, much of her work is extremely well-researched and insightful. Our disagreements with her interpretations will be treated as the chapter and the study unfold.

¹¹⁸ *Dhamm al-ghurūr*, 229.

Earlier in the same chapter, specifically in the section treating the various kinds of self-delusion rampant among the Sufis (*al-mutaṣawwifā*), he also explains

the [various] types of delusion [encountered] in the path of wayfaring toward God, be He exalted, cannot be contained in volumes and cannot be examined save after commenting on all of the sciences of the Unveiling,¹¹⁹ and that is among the things for which there is no licence [permitting] their mentioning. Also, perhaps the amount (*al-qadr*) which we have [already] mentioned would have been better left [unwritten], since the wayfarer belonging to this path does not need to hear it from someone else. And the one who is not following [this path] does not benefit from hearing it; indeed, maybe he would sustain some injury because of [hearing] it, since that would bequeath bewilderment¹²⁰ [to] him inasmuch as he would hear something that he does not understand.

However, there is a benefit in [such an experience]: namely, his being liberated¹²¹ from the deception in which he is [submerged]. Indeed, maybe he would come to believe that the matter is [far] greater than he had supposed it [to be] and had imagined it [to be] by reason of his short-sighted mind, his limited imagination, and his embellished argumentation.¹²² [And maybe] he would also come to believe what was told to him of the Unveilings, about which the saints of God report.¹²³

In other words, he says that there are two basic types of people: the self-deluded, whose various delusions in relation to truth are too many to be counted and who, rather than drawing benefit from an exposure to unveiled discourse, might actually be harmed by it, and the mystic wayfarer (*al-sālik*), who has no need to hear about the Unveilings from someone else. From this first group, however, there might be some who can be shocked out of their deluded certitude and complacency by hearing something which is beyond their understanding, something persuading them to consider that the path to

¹¹⁹ It is somewhat curious that he speaks of “commenting on all of the sciences of the Unveiling” when in other places he tells the reader that such sciences cannot be spoken of save through metaphor.

¹²⁰ More literally, “astonishment” (*dahshā*). In this context, however, he is clearly intending something more vexing and more threatening to simple faith.

¹²¹ Literally, “extracted”.

¹²² This is yet another example of how an overexposure to or excessive reliance upon the science of *kalām* can become a veil and a barrier, keeping one from the higher truths of the religious teachings.

¹²³ *Dhamm al-ghurūr*, 223–4.

God might actually be much greater than anything they have hitherto conceived or imagined. This latter type might find themselves enhanced by what they have heard and might also come to take stock in what the saints have shared with them of the Unveilings. Thus, being ignorant and deluded but still potentially receptive of the truth, they may—as a result of some exposure to the unveilings—wake up and embark upon the path of mysteries, the path of those wayfaring to God.

Al-Ghazālī's own discovery of Sufism, according to his account in the *Munqidh*, occurred in a manner similar to this: first by learning from the writings and traditions of masters such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, al-Junayd, and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī, and then by gradually entering into the experience about which he had been studying and for which he had been hungering.

I came to know the core of their theoretical aims and I learned all that could be learned of their way by study and hearing.

Then it became clear to me that their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruitional experience and the state of ecstasy and “the exchange of qualities [*tabaddul al-ṣifāt*]”.¹²⁴

In the *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul* (the Book of Affirming [Divine] Unity and of Relying [upon God]), al-Ghazālī admits again that he has included some of the secrets of the Unveilings in his composition of the *Ihyā'*, but this he says was for a very practical reason. In reference to the multiple levels of meaning carried by the term *al-tawḥīd*, he explains,

it is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling. However, some of the sciences of the Unveiling are connected to works (*al-ʿmāl*) through the intermediacy of the states (*al-aḥwāl*), and the knowledge of Right Practice cannot be complete save through them. Hence, we will only go into [it] to the extent that [it] bears on [the knowledge of] Right Practice. Otherwise, *al-tawḥīd* is the vast ocean that has no shore . . .¹²⁵

In other words, just as he is compelled to speak of the Unveilings in the service of his explication of Right Practice, so too he is bound to exercise tremendous restraint in order to shield the uninitiated from disclosures that might prove too perplexing and overwhelming.

¹²⁴ From McCarthy's translation in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 90.

¹²⁵ *Ihyā'*, vol. 5, 118.

Still, however, especially in this and a few other books of the *Ihyā'*, he goes far enough into the mysterious waters that the reader is often left with the feeling that there is another agenda at work, an agenda that calls to mind his earlier statement that sometimes exposing the Unveilings is worth the risk, i.e., when a sleeping or heedless person of capacity is roused from his or her slumber by the flashing of a text that inspires a sense of wonder. We are thus led toward a hypothesis suggesting a secondary intention in his frequent and sometimes detailed dipping into the ocean of the Unveiling. It seems that, while the *Ihyā'* was written to be both readable and practicable for the literate commoner, it was also written as an esoteric primer for those possessing both a latent capacity and a degree of receptivity to esoteric content.¹²⁶ This hypothesis does not preclude the possible existence of multilevel writing in parts of the text.

Certainly this is in harmony with al-Ghazālī's thrust when he quotes Jesus' command in the *Book of Knowledge*, specifically in the middle of a discussion of ecstatic utterances (*al-shath*).

“Do not lay out wisdom among those [who are] not its folk lest you do it injustice; neither withhold it from its folk lest you do them injustice. Be like the gentle physician who puts the medicine on the place of the malady.” And, in another expression, [he says] “whosoever lays out wisdom to those [who are] other than its [own] folk has done an ignorant thing,¹²⁷ and whosoever bars it from its [own] folk has done injustice. Verily wisdom has a right, and it has a folk, so give to each¹²⁸ its right”.¹²⁹

And it would also be in harmony with the intention behind his quoting the Prophet's statement, “If any of you pass on to a people a *ḥadīth* that they cannot understand, then strife will fall upon them”.¹³⁰ Thus, like the Qur'ān itself, religious teachings and texts and should increase the certitude of the common person while arousing a sense of mystery that will touch upon an innate inquisitiveness in the heart of the sleeping or potential wayfarer.

¹²⁶ This is a hypothesis shared by Lazarus-Yafeh, who argues that the *Ihyā'* is among the most esoteric of al-Ghazālī's opera. She fails, however, to take al-Ghazālī's own practice-oriented explanation into account as she posits her own. See her chapter on “the Esoteric Aspect of al-Ghazzālī's Writings,” pp. 357–411, esp. 363–373.

¹²⁷ Literally, “has been ignorant”.

¹²⁸ i.e. “to each possessor of a right”.

¹²⁹ *al-'ilm*, 51.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*.

That al-Ghazālī was preoccupied with the protection of simple belief need not be stressed, for many of the texts we have already seen are replete with statements to this effect. Another clear example comes immediately after the passage cited above. As he continues to treat the topic of heresies, which for him equally include the public airing of ecstatic utterances and the dissemination of heretical interpretations of the scriptures, he writes against

the turning of religious expressions away from their understood literal [meanings] and toward inner matters from which [a clear] benefit is never left for the understandings [of average people], as is the custom of the Bāṭiniya in [their] esoteric interpretations (*al-ta'wīlāt*). For this is also forbidden and its harm is grievous.

For, if the expressions are turned from the requirement[s] of their literal [meanings] without any [kind of] adherence to [them] by way of a transmission from the Prophet (*sāhib al-shar'*), and without any necessity calling for it [based on] rational justification (*min dalīl al-'aql*), then that [turning of the expressions] claims for itself [the status of] invalidity of confidence (*baṭlān al-thiqa*) in [reference to] the expressions. And by [reason of] it, the avail of God's speech and that of His Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) falls away. For that which is left from it for the understanding is not trustworthy. The [esoteric] inner [interpretation]¹³¹ has no precision (*al-dabt*); rather, the inclinations of the mind contradict it. Its "revelation"¹³² can [come] in various forms (*'alā wujūh shattā*), and this is also among the widespread, grievous and harmful heresies.¹³³

Both the ecstatic utterances and the heretical interpretations he considers travesties (*al-tammāt*) and reproves for the same reason: they shake the faith of the common person, who is vulnerable to losing faith in the plain meanings of religious expressions while the esoteric meanings elude and bewilder him. Thus, if there were to be any secret sewing of esoteric doctrine in exoteric texts, it would have to have been done in such a way as to leave the literal meanings untouched by ambiguity or excessive mystery.

¹³¹ It should be noted that al-Ghazālī is using the term *bāṭin* (inner/esoteric) here in conjunction with the heretical Bāṭiniya movement, against whom he wrote some tracts. When he uses the term in other contexts, it is not perjorative in the least; indeed, it is often affiliated with the higher truths encountered on the Way.

¹³² The quotation marks are mine. I insert them to show that he is using one of the technical Islamic terms for revelation—*tanzīl*—in order to mimic the claims of the Bāṭiniya. He obviously is not awarding their usage the same reverence it carries in the orthodox, Sunni lexicon.

¹³³ *Al-'ilm*, 51.

This is further corroborated by statements in *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* to the effect that the learned are the guardians of the common people, who are regarded as children, their faith being based on sheer instruction (*al-talqīn al-mujarrad*) and their pure acceptance of inherited tradition (*al-taqlīd al-mahḍā*).¹³⁴ They must be shielded from argumentation and speculation until their faith becomes strong, "like a towering mountain (*al-tawd al-shāmikh*) in its fixity, immovable by storm or lightning." Indeed, trying to strengthen the faith of a child through argumentation, he says, is like trying to strengthen a tree by hitting it and breaking its limbs with an iron mallet.¹³⁵ This harkens back to his warnings about the craft of *kalām* in the *Book of Knowledge*, a warning he repeats in many places throughout the *Ihyā'*.

Now, while the statement immediately above is clearly directed against the ways of "the practitioners of *kalām* and those argumentative types" rather than against the ways of the Sufis, it is clear that, in relation to the common people, the danger of overexposure to anything which might cause a disturbance in their simple faith poses the same problem, for it is the ambiguity and doubt which leaves them exposed to the grave dangers. Indeed, perplexity itself, which can be seen as a condition resulting from overexposure to ambiguity and doubt, is likened to a sickness.¹³⁶ "For surely the common man is weak; the argumentation of the innovator [can easily] agitate and excite him even if it is totally false." Thus,

the learned [must] devote themselves to the protection of the creed from the obfuscations of innovation for the sake of the masses, just as the authorities [must] devote themselves to the safeguarding of their property from the attacks of the wicked and the usurpers.¹³⁷

This trust between the learned and the common necessitates great restraint on the part of the learned, for, as al-Ghazālī explains in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*,¹³⁸ "speaking clearly about the essence of the Truth one must almost directly contradict the apriori notions of the masses . . ." ¹³⁹ Similarly, in the *Qawā'id*, he alludes to the grave danger of this seeming contradiction when he writes,

¹³⁴ *Qawā'id*, 123.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *al-Munqidh*: see McCarthy's translation in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 87–88.

¹³⁷ *Qawā'id*, 127–8.

¹³⁸ See McCarthy's translations of selections in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 333–361.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.

True unveiling (*al-kashf al-haqīqī*) is an attribute of the secret of the heart and its inner [meaning]. However, if the discourse drifts so as to move the imagination [to conceive] that the literal, exoteric is contradicted by the inner, esoteric, then a brief word is necessary to clear it up. Whoever says that the truth (*al-haqīqa*) is at variance with the *sharī'a* or that the esoteric contradicts the exoteric is closer to *kuf̄r* than he is to *Imān* . . .¹⁴⁰

Thus, while finding no direct fault with great mystics such as al-Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī, he does admit that their public, unveiled utterances caused great harm among the common people, who could not help but misunderstand the true intentions behind such utterances. For this reason, al-Ghazālī says that “to kill [the person, namely al-Ḥallāj, who makes such public exclamations] is, according to the religion of God, preferable to bringing ten back to life”.¹⁴¹ Such a statement can only be understood in the light of the gravity of the trust invested in the learned, which is his main thrust here. In other contexts, both within and without the *Ihyā'*, he is much milder, apologetic, and even downright laudatory in the case of al-Ḥallāj.¹⁴² Curiously, he is more consistent in his defense of Abū Yazīd, whose statements must have been mistaken or misunderstood, he says following his condemnation of al-Ḥallāj in the *Book of Knowledge*.¹⁴³

As is abundantly clear, all this assumes a rather sharply drawn division of humanity into various levels or capacities, a hierarchical classification that asserts itself again and again throughout the *Ihyā'* and in many other works.¹⁴⁴ Although this has already shown itself, it will be treated more fully below. In the light of our present discussion, it is useful to note that this frank division of humanity into a non-arbitrary elite and common makes multivalent discourse not only possible but necessary if one is to entertain the notion of transmitting esoteric content in written form.

It is necessary because, according to al-Ghazālī, in exoteric religion, including its laws, practices and articles of faith, there are

secrets and subtle mysteries whose comprehension is not [within] the capacity or power of the intellect, just as in [the case of] the special

¹⁴⁰ *Qawā'id*, 131.

¹⁴¹ *al-'ilm*, 50.

¹⁴² See *Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul (Ihyā'*, vol. V), 120.

¹⁴³ *Al-'ilm*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ For a preliminary briefing, see al-Ghazālī's accounts in the *Qawā'id*, 130–1.

[properties] of stones there are matters and wonders whose knowledge escapes the masters¹⁴⁵ of [that] craft to the extent that no one is able to know the reason by which the magnet attracts iron. And the wonders and marvels [contained] within the articles of belief and their benefit to the purity of the hearts, [along with] their cleansing, [formal] purification, chastening, and betterment for [the sake of their] ascension to the proximity of God, be He exalted, and their exposure to the breezes of His favor, [all these are] more numerous and more momentous than anything related to medicines and medicinal remedies.¹⁴⁶

The single exception to this general state of ignorance is the case of God's prophets and "friends". For everyone else, knowledge of the mysteries promises serious spiritual injury and possibly even ruin in extreme circumstances.¹⁴⁷

. . . only the prophets and the *awliyā'* have acquired them [i.e. the mysteries]. Hence, it is necessary to keep people from searching for them and to return them to that which the Revealed Law utters, for that is sufficient for the fortunate [person]. How many an individual who plunged into the sciences was injured by them? Had he not plunged into [these sciences] his spiritual condition would have been better than that which it became. It is not denied, then, that [such] knowledge is injurious to some people, just as bird meat and [certain] kinds of fine sweets harm the suckling infant. Indeed, it may be that ignorance about some things is beneficial to an individual.¹⁴⁸

In connection with this final point, al-Ghazālī narrates a story in which a physician deliberately lies to a patient in order to compel her (through fear and mortification) to change her living and eating habits so that she may become fit for conception. Believing that she is on the verge of death, her extreme anxiety keeps her from eating or drinking for forty days, which results in the weight loss needed to unblock the fatty obstacle that had been preventing conception. "I knew that she would not lose weight except by reason of the fear of death, and so I frightened her with that until she lost weight and the impediment to her conceiving was no more," explains the doctor.¹⁴⁹ In the same way, people must be compelled along the path to the next world, for "the minds are unable to grasp that which

¹⁴⁵ Literally, "the folk (*ahl*) of that craft . . ."

¹⁴⁶ *al-'ilm*, 44.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

will benefit the life of the Hereafter, since life experience does not penetrate [these things]”.¹⁵⁰

In the same way, al-Ghazālī argues, prophets must adopt special methods, the knowledge of which would cause injury to the faith of the layman.

Know that, just as the proficient physician is acquainted with secrets regarding remedies from which one who is ignorant of them should keep away, so too are the prophets, who are the physicians of the hearts, and the learned in the causes [affecting] life in the Hereafter. Hence do not, with your [limited] knowledge, make yourself the judge of their custom[s] lest you perish.¹⁵¹

In light of this grave danger, he advises a little earlier,

Don't be one who searches after sciences that the Religious Law declares blameworthy and from which it restrains [people]. Stick to [your] adherence to the [ways of the] Companions, may God be pleased with them, and restrict [yourself] to following the *sunna* [of the Prophet], for [your] well-being lies in compliance [with these], but danger lies in searching after [such sciences] and in independence [from the tradition].¹⁵²

This obvious distinction between the veiled, action-oriented (exoteric—*zāhir/mu'āmalā*) and the unveiled, gnosis-oriented (esoteric—*bāṭin/mukāshafa*) is not unique to al-Ghazālī. Indeed, even in the *Qawā'id*, he provides us with a brief history of Islamic esotericism and its masters, whose ranks include the Prophet himself, 'Alī bn Abī Ṭālib, Abū Bakr, Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Hurayrah, and Sahl al-Tustarī, whom al-Ghazālī quotes as having said,

Belonging to the learned man are three [types] of knowledge: exoteric (*zāhir*) knowledge which he presents to the literal-minded people (*ahl al-zāhir*); the esoteric whose explication is restricted to its own folk; and a knowledge that he keeps to himself, [a knowledge] between him and God . . .¹⁵³

Of course, the Qur'ān itself frequently employs parables and metaphorical utterances¹⁵⁴ and often admits to having signs (*āyāt*) and meanings that are only grasped by “those possessing understandings” (*ūlū*

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Qawā'id*, 131.

¹⁵⁴ The Book itself testifies to this. See *sūrat al-Nūr* (24): 35; *Yūnus* (10): 24.

albāb)¹⁵⁵ and “a people who are cognizant” (*qawm ya‘lamūn*)¹⁵⁶ and allegorical meanings that are known only to God and “the well-grounded in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūn fī ‘l-‘ilm*).¹⁵⁷ The Qur’ān also provides very clear examples of how esoteric content can appear to clash with and even contradict the exoteric teachings, as in the case of Moses and Khidr in *sūrat al-Kahf*.¹⁵⁸

According to our reading of al-Ghazālī, then, just as sacred scripture contains both exoteric and esoteric levels of meaning, so must religion itself along with religious discourse, which—for the vast majority of humankind—must needs be praxis-oriented rather than gnosis-oriented. This explains his conspicuously Qur’ānic tone whenever he is entering into potentially volatile areas: “So let us mention now [something] of the exposition of the heart’s marvels—by way of the striking of similitudes—[mentioning] something that will come within the range of people’s understandings . . .”¹⁵⁹ The religious devotion and religiously-oriented intellectual pursuits of average people should be untroubled by unveiled esoteric utterances, which could easily damage or even destroy their simple belief and thus their chance for some kind of felicity in the next world.

It is in this spirit and for this reason, we argue, that the *Ihyā’* veils its esoteric content, which is at times almost entirely absent and at times is almost entirely unveiled. This unique and admittedly uneven style of composition is what will afford us the opportunity of uncovering a significant part of his “unspeakable” doctrines of the soul and the Afterlife. And, with careful attention to context, the subsequent chapters will also attempt to piece together the stratified layers of religious truth, each of which he will defend in its own context and according to its own objectives.

¹⁵⁵ For example, *sūrat Ṣād* (38): 29.

¹⁵⁶ *Yūnus* (10): 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Sūrat Al Imrān* (3): 7. It must be noted here that the majority of classical exegetes, incl. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, do not read “the well-grounded in knowledge” as being in apposition (*ma‘tūf*) to “God”, thus taking some of the impact out of this particular *āya*. However, the ambiguity in the text has led other highly respected exegetes, incl. Mujāhid, to take God and “the well-grounded in knowledge” together.

¹⁵⁸ (18): 60 ff. Although he does not mention this particular Qur’ānic text in the *Kūtāb al-‘ilm* or the *Qawā‘id al-‘aqā‘id*, he does mention it elsewhere, such as in the *Mishkāt al-anwār*.

¹⁵⁹ *Sharḥ ‘aqā‘id al-qalb*, 113. Compare his language here to *sūrat al-Nūr* (24): 35.

CHAPTER TWO

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S DOGMATIC/THEOLOGICAL (*KALĀMĪ*) FORMULATION OF THE SOUL

In spite of what we have seen in the previous chapter, it is often argued that, if we wish to know al-Ghazālī's true personal position on any number of religious topics, we must turn to works written with the intention of affirming and explaining proper doctrine, the "doctrine of Truth" as al-Ghazālī himself calls it. Indeed, such a work is even promised in the *Tahāfut*, which names the anticipated treatise *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*.

As for the affirmation of the doctrine of the Truth, we will compose a book about it after a period of rest from this [current work], if God wills that success [be granted] to assist [us]. We will name it *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, and in it we will concern ourselves with the establishment [of right doctrine], just as we have concerned ourselves in this book with the demolition [of heretical doctrine]. And God knows best.¹

While this investigation will take us into the realm of dogmatic theology or the *kalām*, it still may raise some questions or reveal some positions that will serve our search for some self-disclosure concerning the true nature of the human soul. In addition, a thorough exposure to his dogmatic theological discussions of the soul and the Afterlife will assist us in piecing together at least one part of the puzzle facing us. For these reasons, then, we turn to the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, being the second book of the *Ihyā'*, and also to *al-Iqtisād fī 'l-ītiqād*, which is an earlier but more detailed and more advanced version of the *Qawā'id*.² Indeed, in his *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn* al-Ghazālī extolls the *Iqtisād* as being "more eloquent in analysis and

¹ *Tahāfut*, 80.

² Although book two of the *Ihyā'* bears the exact title promised in the *Tahāfut*, some see this promise better fulfilled by *al-Iqtisād fī 'l-ītiqād*, which is regarded by some as a companion to the *Tahāfut*, composed while Abū Ḥāmid was still teaching at the Nizāmiya in Baghdad. To corroborate this theory, Marmura points out that al-Ghazālī states in the *Iqtisād* that the aim of the work is precisely "*qawā'id al-'aqā'id*"—thus fulfilling the spirit of the promise rather than the letter. See Marmura, "Bodily Resurrection," 50–1.

closer to knocking on the doors of gnosis (*al-ma'rifa*) than the official *kalām* one finds in the books of the *mutakallimūn*.³ Due to the importance and complementarity of both works, then, we will consider them together here.

Turning briefly again to the *Tahāfut*, specifically to the beginning of his second preface, al-Ghazālī writes that one of the ways in which “the philosophers” differ from their counterparts (i.e., the dogmatic theologians) is in “sheer terminology” (*lafz mujarrad*).

Such as their calling the Fashioner of the universe (be He exalted)—according to their discourse—a *jawhar*. [This is] in light of their understanding that the *jawhar* is the existent not inhering in a substrate (*lā fi mawḍūʿ*), that is, the self-sufficient [existent] having no need of a formative agent (*muqawwim*) to establish it (*yuqawwimuhu*). They do not intend by “*jawhar*” that which occupies space (*mutahayyiz*), as is intended by their opponents.⁴

While our substantive treatment of the *Tahāfut* awaits us in the next chapter, this statement is instructive here for two reasons: first, it shows that there is a general problem of equivocity surrounding the term *jawhar* (“substance” or “atom”) in the fields of medieval Islamic philosophy and theology;⁵ second, it reveals that al-Ghazālī’s own understanding of the term, insofar as he can be counted among the opponents of the philosophers, explicitly ties spatiality (and thus materiality) to the term. This proves to be an essential yet problematic point as we proceed to examine his dogmatic theological treatments of the nature of the human soul.

His theological psychology begins with a speculative explication of the entire created universe, which, by definition, must include the human soul and everything else that is other than God. Simply put, in the idiom of the Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn* (among others), the created world reduces to atoms, bodies, and accidents. In the first of the four main points (*aqṭāb*) of the *Iqtisād*, he writes,

³ (Cairo: Maktabat al-jundī, 1964), 22.

⁴ *Tahāfut*, 41.

⁵ “Substance” reflects the usage of the Islamic philosophical tradition, about which al-Ghazālī is speaking in the passage cited above, while “atom” reflects the signification common within the *kalām* circles. See A. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām* (Leiden/NY: E.J. Brill, 1994), 55ff. Equivocity can be found even among the *mutakallimūn*, however, one example being the Muʿtazilī theologian Muʿammar (d.c. 835), an atomist who apparently held that the soul was a *jawhar*, but of a purely spiritual, non-material nature. See al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islamīyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: 1930), 331–2; see also Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 51–2.

We say: belonging to the creation of every created thing is a cause, and the [entire] universe (*al-‘ālam*) is a created thing. Hence, it necessarily follows from [this] that it must have a cause. Now by “universe” we mean each and every existent other than God, and by “each and every existent other than God”—be he exalted—we mean all of the bodies and their accidents. A detailed explanation of this is that we do not doubt the principle of existence; then we know that every existent either does or does not occupy space, and we call each space-occupying thing a “singular *jawhar*” when it contains no combination [to other *jawāhir*].⁶ When it combines with another [atom], we call it a “body”. If [the existent] does not occupy space, either its existence requires a body in which to subsist, and we call [such existents] “accidents”, or [its existence] does not require [a body], and [this] is God—be He praised and exalted.⁷

In order to ensure clarity, he carefully defines his terms in the ensuing pages, and here he makes it plain that, when saying that the universe is created, “all we intend through [our use of the term] ‘the universe’ now is the bodies and the *jawāhir* (atoms) only”.⁸ Also, to avoid any misunderstanding about the spatiality of the *jawāhir*, he explains a few pages later that the *jawhar*, by necessity, is subject to motion and rest,⁹ which are observable, spatial events. Thus, while a particular spatial specificity is not part of the essence of the *jawhar*,¹⁰ spatiality is.

If one were to try to posit an immaterial soul in this theoretical context, it would have to fall under the category of accident;¹¹ alternatively, were one to argue that the soul is a single *jawhar*, it would have to be spatial and therefore material in some respect, for all *jawāhir* are space-occupying. Indeed, from this passage and the ensuing pages, he leaves no room for a third alternative, namely an immaterial soul that is separate from God and yet is, at the same time, neither a *jawhar* (occupying space) nor an accident.

This preliminary consideration of the soul in the context of what we may call his “Ash‘arī atomism”¹² begets many theological ques-

⁶ “*Jawāhir*” is the Arabic “broken” plural of *jawhar*.

⁷ *Al-Iqtisād*, 57 (Ankara edition, 24).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹ This is one of the theological positions mentioned in the Twentieth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*. See p. 242 and following. It is also the primary position advanced in the *Iqtisād*, as we will see shortly.

¹² This will be explained below.

tions: what about the angels? Are they material and hence spatial? Also, what about the human spirit that survives the body's demise and remains conscious in order to suffer the torment of the grave and to be questioned by Munkar and Nakīr? Also, what about the souls of the martyrs, which are said to be "living"—"and do not say of those who are slain in the way of God [that they are] dead; nay, they are alive, but ye perceive not."¹³ One also is left with the puzzle of the enigmatic *āya* (42) from *sūrat al-Ẓumar* (39),

God takes the souls (*yatawaffā al-anfus*) at the time of their death, and those that have not died [He takes] during their sleep; He holds on to those upon whom death has been decreed, and He sends the others [back] until an appointed time. Surely in that are signs for people who reflect.

If the soul is an accident, subsisting in and contingent upon the living body, how can it be taken separately each night and how can it "live" to experience the post-mortem events prior to the resurrection? Likewise, if the soul is material, how can these events be possible once the matter of the person is dead and decomposing?

If this is the position truly espoused by al-Ghazālī in the *Iqtisād*, it is not a position free of problems, both philosophical and exegetical. There is also the inarguable fact that a change in the variable of time between the respective moments of death and resurrection poses a problem concerning the perfect and total identification of the living person (now deceased) with the resurrected person (yet to be). How can a belief in the "material soul" (theoretically subject to annihilation) or the identification of the soul with an accident inhering in the body accommodate these logical and exegetical difficulties?¹⁴

He does, toward the end of the *Iqtisād*, specifically in the discussion "Showing the Necessity of Believing in the Articles Conveyed by the Revealed Law" (*al-bāb al-thānī*), make an effort to clear up these concerns. Here, the respective definitions of *jawhar*, body, and accident are applied in concrete and telling ways. For example, al-Ghazālī dialectically poses to himself a question concerning the true nature of death and God's resurrecting (*al-ī'ādā*) of that which has died.

¹³ *al-Baqara* (2): 154.

¹⁴ This is not to say that the belief in an immaterial soul makes all of these difficulties any more workable. For example, how can an immaterial soul "return" to the body in the grave and experience the torture promised there? Certainly this tradition assumes some kind of spatiality and materiality in connection with the human spirit or soul. See Marmura, "Bodily Resurrection," 52.

If it were said, “so what do you say, do [both] the *jawāhir* and the accidents become annihilated and are then both restored together? Or are the accidents annihilated without the *jawāhir* [being destroyed] in which case only the accidents are then restored?” [To this] we say, “anything¹⁵ is possible. In the Revealed Law there is no conclusive indication (*dalīl qāṭiʿ*) specifying one of these two possibilities. The first of the two modes (*wāḥid al-wajḥayn*) is that the accidents are annihilated while the body of the person remains preserved, in the form of earth (*bi-ṣūra(t) al-turāb*), for example. It would be [the case], then, that life, color, moisture, composition, shape (*al-hayʿa*), and the collectivity of [its] accidents would cease to exist, and the meaning of their “restoration” would thus be that all these very same accidents¹⁶ are returned to them [i.e., the bodies]. Or¹⁷ [it could be that] replicas of them are returned to [the bodies], for, according to us, the accident does not remain.¹⁸ And “life” is an accident; likewise, the existent (*al-mawjūd*) is, according to us, a different accident in every moment (*fī kulli sāʿa*). And the human being is that particular human being by virtue of his body, and he is one thing not by virtue of his accidents (for each accident that is renewed is other than the one before—*ghayr al-ākhar*). Hence, positing [God’s] restoration of the accidents is not one of the conditions for the restoration [of the individual body]. We have only mentioned this because some of the friends have been led to believe that it is impossible [for God] to restore [the exact] accidents, which is false; however, the discourse [required] for the demonstration of its futility is long, and there is no need for it in light of our purpose [in writing] this.¹⁹

Al-Ghazālī goes on to say that the second perspective on this issue of God’s restoration of the person is that “the bodies also become annihilated and are then restored through undergoing a second creation [*ex nihilo*].” When raising the related question as to how one would explain then how this “resurrected” being could be identified as the very same existent that had once been and not merely a semblance of the former existent, al-Ghazālī explains that the essence of the annihilated existent remains in God’s knowledge and there is

¹⁵ The translation is literal, but the clear implication here is that “either alternative” is possible.

¹⁶ All of the aforementioned accidents are individually repeated in the Arabic text. To avoid redundancy and to foster readability, then, I have slightly abridged the Arabic.

¹⁷ Following the Ankara edition, we read “or” (أو) instead of “and” (و).

¹⁸ According to the Ashʿarite occasionalism, accidents must be recreated in every successive moment in order for there to be any semblance of continuity in their existence. See Majid Fakhri’s *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), esp. 56–82.

¹⁹ *Al-Iqtisād*, 233–4 (Ankara edition, 213–4).

kept in two separate parts: that which had been proper to it in terms of its existence and that which had not properly belonged to it in terms of its existence.

In the same way, al-Ghazālī explains, nonexistence (*al-ʿadam*) is eternally divided into that which will have existence and into that which God knows will not exist. Thus, God's restoration here means putting existence in the place of the [state of] "nonexistence", which had itself been preceded by existence.

Although there are many salient points to be highlighted in the passage cited above, both exegetical and philosophical, the first is al-Ghazālī's reluctance to go into too much speculative detail, a clear indication that his *kalām* is determined to remain within its proper confines—the consolidation and clear articulation of basic belief. Next, we might note a somewhat curious change of terminology in the very middle of the passage. In the beginning, the discussion is about accidents and *jawāhir*, and, as we follow him through the paragraph, the discussion turns to one of accidents and bodies: with no further mentioning of the *jawāhir*. This could be taken in various ways: 1) that al-Ghazālī is using the terms *jism* (body) and *jawhar* synonymously, in which case the discussion never strays from the initial question of *jawāhir* (which we must take to be contiguous) and accidents; or 2) that he naturally and unconsciously slips into discussing the *jawāhir* as they are universally found in the natural world, i.e., in various states of bodily conjunction; or 3) that he has shifted the discussion to bodies so as to avoid dealing with the more complicated and admittedly more speculative question of the fate of the *jawāhir* during and after death.

Given his efforts to distinguish between bodies and atoms earlier in the *Iqtisād*, it seems unlikely that al-Ghazālī would use two such formally distinct concepts in an equivocal way. So let us rule out the first of these possible interpretations for the time being. The second alternative is more plausible, especially in light of the fact that the *Iqtisād* is clearly written to be a popular work. If we were to pursue the third possibility, we would be led to suspect that he is being evasive about the status of the individual *jawāhir* after death. Why? This question has led some scholars to conclude that al-Ghazālī is being intentionally evasive here due to the fact that he equates the essence of the human being with a single, non-corporeal *jawhar*, an immaterial entity that has no place in the standard Ashʿarī doctrine of the created world. Such a doctrine would also be at odds

with his public condemnation of the *falāsifa* and their doctrine of the immaterial rational soul, they argue.²⁰

These questions can be puzzling, but he seems to have anticipated many of them, and so, when one takes the ensuing discussion of the *Iqtisād* into account, there seems to be very little room for such speculation about an immaterial *jawhar*. Reminding us that the *Tahāfut* was about the demolition of certain doctrines rather than the construction or putting forth of his own doctrines, al-Ghazālī briefly recalls his lengthy refutation of the philosophical doctrines:

For the sake of showing the futility of their doctrine, we went along with the presumption [that] the soul remains [after death], a soul deemed by them to be utterly non-spatial, and the presumption that the returning of [the soul's] management of the body is the same regardless of whether it is the very same body or a different body. But that is [just] a [way of] forcing upon them [something] that does not concur with what we believe.²¹

Further, he mentions their belief that the human being is a particular human being by virtue of his soul (*bi-ṣtibāni nafsihi*), that his occupation of space [in a body] is to be considered as an accident belonging to him, and that the person's body is only an instrument (*āla*) of the soul. He writes,

after their belief in the remaining of the soul [after death], we forced upon them the necessity of believing in [God's] restoration, i.e., the return of the soul to the management of some body. But [such] theorizing now in the analysis of this chapter [would entail] researching the spirit, the soul, life and its verities, and [our treatment of] basic dogma (*al-mu'taqidāt*) will not bear plunging into these extreme heights concerning the intelligibles . . .²²

Thus, there is no need in this work, he says, to delve into such theoretical issues—the very issues that his shifting away from the *jawhar* seems to raise in the *Iqtisād* passage cited above. “What we have mentioned is sufficient for the showing of the middle road in belief, for the sake of [affirming] belief in what has been conveyed by the Revealed Law”.²³ The questions that his theological position raises, however, remain unanswered and wait for some fuller treatment.

²⁰ In contemporary studies on al-Ghazālī, this question has been largely raised by Richard Frank. More will be said about his interpretation of al-Ghazālī below.

²¹ *Al-Iqtisād*, 235 (Ankara edition, 215).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

A bit further into the *Iqtisād*, specifically in his explanation of the interrogation of the soul by Munkar and Nakīr, he revisits the sensitive topic of the soul after death:

As for the questioning [of the soul] by Munkar and Nakīr, it is a truth, and believing in it is obligatory according to what has been conveyed by the Revealed Law concerning it and [because of] its being possible. For that [interrogation] requires nothing from them [Munkar and Nakīr] except that they make [the dead person] understand, [either] via sound or via something other than sound, for the only thing that is required from him [i.e. the deceased] is comprehension. And understanding necessitates only [some kind of] life. But the human being does not understand with all of his body; rather, [he comprehends through] a part (*juz'*) of the inner aspect of his heart.²⁴ And the reviving of a part that can understand the interrogation and respond is [logically] possible, doable.^{25, 26}

Acknowledging that we neither see nor hear Munkar and Nakīr, al-Ghazālī argues that no one was able to see or hear Gabriel when he appeared and spoke to the Prophet, and yet “one believing in the Revealed Law cannot deny that”.²⁷ This analogy may satisfy the dogmatic concern, but it does not answer the fundamental question of the psychology underlying this passage: what exactly is this “part of the interior aspect of the heart”? Is it material? The term he uses here—*juz'*—certainly suggests materiality,²⁸ but the context seems to deny it. And what exactly is the “interior aspect” (*bāṭin*) of the heart? Is it also material and (thus) spatial? Is this “heart” understood here to be the physical organ, or is it something else? These questions arise naturally and predictably from the passage, and so we might assume that al-Ghazālī knew they were there, waiting for resolution. However, he does not tell us any more in the *Iqtisād*.²⁹ Given what

²⁴ Much more will be said about this “part of the inner aspect” of the heart in the following chapter.

²⁵ “Able to be done” is a more formal rendering, but I think the colloquial Americanism suits the Arabic phrase perfectly, and thus I opt for this vernacular rendering.

²⁶ *Al-Iqtisād*, 236–7 (Ankara edition, 217).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Among the Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī *mutakallimūn*, the term “part” (*juz'*) is a technical term synonymous with “atom” (*jawhar*). Hence, his usage of this particular term, when viewed in the light of standard *kalām* usage, gives weight to a material, atomic psychology underlying this passage. See A. Dhanani's *The Physical Theory of Kalām*, 55–62.

²⁹ He does, however, tell us more in other books, such as in his account of Munkar and Nakīr in the final book of the *Ihyā'*, the *Kūṭab dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba'dahu*

he has explained of the created world prior to this, we must assume then that this “part” is material and space-occupying in some way, for he does not treat it as an accident inhering in the body.

His use of the term “heart” in this context is curious and somewhat problematic, for it does not belong to the technical lexicon of Ash‘arī *kalām*. Rather, this term predominates in his mystical writings, to which we will turn in the fourth chapter, and seems to be out of place here, where it does little but add to the questions arising from the passage.

In *al-Risāla al-qudsīya*, which was written several years after al-Ghazālī’s departure from Baghdad,³⁰ and yet was considered by al-Ghazālī himself to be simpler and more popular than the *Iqtīṣād*,³¹ there is little indication that al-Ghazālī made any significant departures from what we have already seen. As this work is woven into fabric of the *Kitāb Qawā‘id al-‘aqā’id*, the second book of the *Ihyā’*, there is no need to treat it separately.

The *Qawā‘id* was assembled well after both the *Iqtīṣād* and the *Risāla* were composed, and, although we can therefore factor in a temporal shift, we find al-Ghazālī’s treatment of the *jawhar* to remain unchanged. Indeed, there seems to be nothing left to fuel any lingering suspicions of an immaterial soul—at least as far as his *kalām* is concerned. Here, as in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtīṣād*, an explicit and necessary connection between the *jawhar* and spatiality is struck, and this point is made in several places.

For example, in the third chapter, specifically in his commentary on the ten principles entailed in the knowledge of God’s essence, he says that

The fourth principle is the knowledge that He—be He exalted—is in no way a *jawhar* [thus] occupying space; on the contrary, exalted and sanctified is He above any connection with spatiality. The demonstration/proof of this is that every *jawhar* occupies space and is characterized by its spatial limits (*biḥayyizihī*), in which it must be either

(vol. VI, esp. p. 143). We do not count this, however, as part of his *kalām* discourse, and so we treat it in the next chapter.

³⁰ See George F. Hourani, “A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī’s Writings” in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, no. 2 (April–June, 1984), 289–304.

³¹ See his ranking of the dogmatic works in *Jawāhīr al-Qur‘ān* (Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīda, 1988), 21. The *Iqtīṣād* seems to be the most sophisticated of these works in his eyes; however, although the *Qawā‘id* contains the contents of the simpler *Risāla*, it stands as being second only to the *Iqtīṣād* in complexity and detail.

resting or from which it must be moving; thus it is never free of some movement or rest, both of which are created [states]. And that which is not free of created phenomena must itself be a created phenomenon. Were a *jawhar* [thus] occupying space to be conceived as an eternal thing, the eternity of the universe's *jawāhir* would be thinkable. If one called Him by the term "*jawhar*" without intending by it "something occupying space" he would be mistaken as far as his terminology goes but not in his meaning.³²

He continues to explain the necessary conclusion of this principle: that God can in no way be a body, because bodies are composed (*mu'allaf*)³³ of atoms (*jawāhir*), which we have seen already to be bound by spatiality. In addition, he explains that

it is impossible for the *jawhar* to be free of separation [from one another], combination, motion, rest, shape, and measure; and [each] of these is called a created occurrence (*al-hudūth*). Were it permissible to believe that the Fashioner of the universe was a body, it would be permissible to believe [that] divinity belongs to the sun and the moon or something else from among the categories of bodies. So if some insolent fellow had the audacity to call Him—be He exalted—a body without intending by that the composition of *jawāhir*, that would be wrong [usage] of the name, in spite of his hitting upon [the mark in] negating the meaning of "body".³⁴

There can be no doubt that materiality and the occupation of space are necessarily attributed to the *jawhar* in his *kalāmī* terminology. The first line of this selection seems to be in accord with one of the doctrines of al-Ash'arī: namely, that the *jawāhir* never exist in isolation from one another, for they are always in the process of adjoining themselves to one another and separating from one another. Such is the *jawhar* as we find it in nature. The import of this particular Ash'arī doctrine will make itself clear as the study unfolds.

In light of some of the questions we raised earlier in the chapter, we might ask again whether this atomic materiality applies to the whole of creation. What of the angels and the heavens? What of the soul? In his exposition of the true creed at the beginning of the *Qawā'id*, which is a part of the treatise not taken directly from the

³² *Qawā'id*, 139. This accords with the *Tahāfut* passage with which we opened the chapter. See *supra*.

³³ This is the classic Ash'arī definition of "body". See A. Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 136.

³⁴ *Qawā'id*, 139–40.

Risāla, al-Ghazālī leaves little room for doubt concerning the materiality of everything other than God:

Everything besides Him—human, jinn, angel, devil, heaven, earth, animal, plant, mineral, atom, accident, that which is perceived by the intellect and that which is sensed—is created, absolutely originated by His Power (*biqudratihi*) following a state of nonexistence. He established it in the way something that had not been anything at all is established. This is because He was, in eternity, an existent alone; none other than Him existed with Him. After that [state] He generated the creation as a manifestation of His power . . .³⁵

In the structure of the first half of this paragraph, there is a movement from specific created beings to increasingly general categories, culminating in “atom (*jawhar*) and accident, that which is perceived [by the intellect] and that which is sensed . . .” In our interpretation of the passage, then, we understand these final categories to be all-embracing, thus summing up and magnifying the Divine *qudra*, which is the real focus of the passage. Certainly, were we to read this passage in the light of the *Iqtīṣād*, it would be taken for granted that “atoms and accidents” sum up the entirety of creation. The question there, i.e., in the *Iqtīṣād*, had pertained to the exact definition of the *jawhar*, a question that the *Qawā'id* seems not to tolerate.

Thus, in his somewhat poetic explication of the divine transcendence (*tanzīh*), al-Ghazālī writes

Surely He is in no way [associated] with a body thus having form, nor with an atom thus being delineated, measured. He does not resemble the bodies—not in measurability, nor in divisibility. And surely He is not [associated] with any atom—they do not inhere in Him—nor with any accident—they do not inhere in Him [either]. No, He does not resemble any existent, and no existent resembles Him. “There is nothing like unto Him.” Nor is He like unto anything, for He is not delineated by [any] scale, and He is not encompassed by the quarters of space . . .³⁶

In his explication of the post-mortem interrogation by Munkar and Nakīr, he essentially repeats what he has already said in the *Iqtīṣād*, explaining that “one of the parts” of the individual is revived for the tasks of hearing and responding.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 117.

³⁶ Ibid., 118.

³⁷ Ibid., 152.

Some scholars, after having examined his psychological statements in the *Iqtīṣād* and other *kalām* works, have recently raised the question as to whether he was truly Ash'arī in his *kalāmī* views concerning the soul.³⁸ In order to clear up this question and to gain a sharper understanding of al-Ghazālī's dogmatic psychology, let us briefly review just what the basic Ash'arī view of the soul entails, and then, by comparing the Ash'arī doctrine to what we have seen of al-Ghazālī's statements in both the *Iqtīṣād* and the *Qawā'id*, we can perhaps shed some better light on our questions.

According to the traditional Ash'arī understanding, the term "*jawhar*" denotes "atom", which is a single, indivisible existent having volume and thus occupying space.³⁹ "Bodies," by contrast, are those things which are composite, meaning either individual atoms in a state of conjunction with/adjunction to other atoms or, alternatively, two (and only two) atoms "that are immediately adjacent or contiguous to one another".⁴⁰ This simple distinction, then, was somewhat complicated by a standing disagreement among the early Ash'arī masters, some (such as al-Juwaynī and his student al-Anṣārī) claiming that a single atom conjoined to another became a single body, the conjunction thus being between two atombodies, while others (such as Ibn Fūrak and al-Qushayrī) claimed that two such conjoined atoms formed together a single composite body.

In any case, in spite of this difference of opinion over the lines of demarcation between the technical terms "body" and "atom", the Ash'arī masters generally agreed that the two terms were formally distinct, that the term "body" properly denoted the presence of conjunction or combination, whereas "atom" implied the discrete, unctiguous existent. Further, they agreed that all atoms were "equal to one another in corporeity and in occupying space . . ." and thus belonged to a single class, each member being "essentially similar (*mumāthil*) to every other".⁴¹

³⁸ Namely Richard Frank and Kojiro Nakamura, both of whom will be considered in the course of this chapter.

³⁹ For example, al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* qualifies the term atom as "that which occupies space". See Richard Frank's "Bodies and Atoms: the Ash'arite Analysis" in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani), ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: SUNY, 1984), 40. Similarly, his *Shāmil* defines the *jawhar* as having volume (*hajm*). See Frank, *al-Ghazālī*, 53 (bottom)—54.

⁴⁰ Frank, "Bodies," p. 53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

Turning to the more general question of the created universe or “the world” (*al-‘ālam*) and its composition, the Ash‘arī masters agreed that by “the world” was meant all that was not God, namely atoms and accidents. Some (such as al-Juwaynī and al-Anṣārī) added “bodies” to this formal definition, though this is certainly implicit in the earlier definitions of al-Baghdādī, al-Qushayrī and others,⁴² since “bodies” are nothing other than atoms in a particular state or modality, as we have seen above. Between the bi and tripartite definitions, then, no substantial difference is noted among them.

Thus, according to this Ash‘arī theory, the soul must needs be a *jawhar* or atom; and life is an accident that falls into a reified “state of nonexistence” upon the body’s death, which is itself an annihilation or a “falling into a state of nonexistence” for the body. This total annihilation, however, does not denote a loss of individual identity, for this is preserved in the Divine knowledge, even while the individual—life and limb—is utterly annihilated. Hence, “resurrection” is God’s recreation of the very same individual with the very same identity, i.e. the very same body with the very same or similar accidents, one of which is its very “life”.⁴³

From the passages we have examined, it can be seen quite clearly that al-Ghazālī’s dogmatic works employ the technical terminology of the *kalām* very much in accordance with the traditional Ash‘arī usage. This is particularly true in the case of the *jawhar*.

An opposing view is that, although it is not disputed that al-Ghazālī was trained as an Ash‘arī *mutakallim*⁴⁴ (among other things) and was widely regarded as such, the extent to which his personal doctrine of created beings followed that of the Ash‘arī school is suspect.⁴⁵ While statements in the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā‘id* affirm that, in using the term *al-‘ālam*, he upholds the Ash‘arī position that the created world is constituted of *jawāhir*, bodies, and accidents,⁴⁶ i.e.,

⁴² For the attribution of these doctrines to the individuals named, see Frank, “Bodies,” 39–41.

⁴³ See *Ibid.*, 57–9. For a more detailed exposition of this Ash‘arī doctrine, see D. Gimaret’s chapter on “life” in his *La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī* (Paris: Le Cerf., 1990).

⁴⁴ And proclaimed thus by later philosophers and theologians, such as Ibn Rushd. See his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930), esp. “Ash‘ariyya” in Index A.

⁴⁵ See Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 48 and following, as well as his “Bodies,” 39–53.

⁴⁶ The language here itself is a synthesis of closely placed statements within the *Iqtisād*. In the *Qawā‘id*, he says that “the world is made up of atoms (*jawāhir*), accidents, and bodies . . .” and that God neither resembles nor is resembled by them. See Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 51–2.

all that is not God, the question is raised as to whether the intentions underlying these technical terms are shared equally by al-Ghazālī and the rest of his Ash'arī *confrères*.

Most critical of these questions concerns the meaning of the term, *jawhar*. Somewhat surprising after we have read the second preface to the *Tahāfut*,⁴⁷ this scholarly view raises the question of equivocity in al-Ghazālī's own use of this term. For example, it is argued that nowhere in the *Iqtīṣād* or any other of the dogmatic works does he attribute volume (*al-ḥajm*) to the *jawhar*, this deletion being a departure from the definition of his teacher, al-Juwaynī.⁴⁸ And, although he does affirm that the *jawāhir* "form a single class . . ." ⁴⁹ and that "occupying space" may properly be attributed to *jawāhir*,⁵⁰ it is argued that he suggests the possibility of *jawāhir* inhering in noncorporeal substrates: that is, or must be, *jawāhir* subsisting in themselves. This would account for existents that do not occupy space⁵¹—presumably existents such as angels, whose nature he refrains from elaborating upon in the *Iqtīṣād*. According to Frank's reading,

al-Ghazālī conspicuously avoids asserting the traditional thesis that created beings must either occupy space or reside in subjects that occupy space (*imma mutahayyizun aw-ḥallun fihi*), as does al-Juwaynī, who argues against the notion of the rational soul and the separated intelligences as beings that are not located in space (*Ikhtīṣār*, fol. 206r). On the contrary . . . in *Iqtīṣād* . . . he makes a point of eliminating "occupies space" (*mutahayyiz*) from the definition of *jawhar*, though he avoids any discussion of immaterial beings.⁵²

Thus, while acknowledging the presence of traditional Ash'arī terms and positions in the aforementioned works, Frank argues that al-Ghazālī makes subtle departures—typically not conspicuous departures of commission but rather the more subtle departures of omission. In these passages, Frank argues, while al-Ghazālī clearly affirms that a *jawhar* can occupy space, he does not explicitly deny that a *jawhar* may also belong to that class of existents that do not occupy space,

⁴⁷ See the citation at the very beginning of the chapter, where al-Ghazālī addresses the problem of equivocation in the theological and philosophical uses of the term.

⁴⁸ See Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 53. The possibility that al-Ghazālī might deem *ḥajm* redundant and thus unnecessary (given his use of *mutahayyiz*) is not considered in this analysis.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 55.

a class that would presumably include the angelic ranks. In short, Frank argues that al-Ghazālī seems here to leave the door open to at least two classes or modalities of *jawāhir*, the material and the immaterial.⁵³

Reading other non-*kalām* texts into this ambiguity or intentional equivocation, Frank is tempted to associate this inferred “immaterial atom” with the rational soul or “heart” treated more extensively by al-Ghazālī in later, mystically-oriented texts that espouse the “heart” as their predominant psychological idiom. Having carefully examined in the first chapter the various genres employed by al-Ghazālī and the respective ends for which each is suited, we are reluctant to follow Frank’s argument across the boundaries of genre, clear boundaries that al-Ghazālī himself has set, lest we confuse genre-specific statements from one group of texts with genre-specific statements in another group. This does not wholly discount Frank’s hypothesis, but it does slow it down, cautioning against a reading that pays no heed to context or genre.

Even if we were to step out of our carefully drawn parameters for a moment and follow Frank to consider this possibility, it would raise questions rather than resolve them. For example, what would be the nature of the conjunction (*al-ijtimāʿ*) between such a single, immaterial, self-subsisting atom and the human body? And, in light of this conjunction, would we then be forced to call it a body (i.e., atombody) by virtue of this conjunction? And, if so, would it then go from being a body to being a self-subsisting immaterial substance upon its separation from the body at death and/or sleep?

We must remember that al-Ghazālī admittedly wrote the *kalām* works to consolidate, strengthen, and protect standard Sunni beliefs.⁵⁴ They were not written to explore in minute detail points of speculative interest or controversy, an abuse of the *kalām* that al-Ghazālī criticizes in the *Book of Knowledge* and other works; indeed, he often cuts potentially complicated discussions short, saying that his purpose is not to indulge in extensive speculation or research. Our read-

⁵³ This hypothesis would link al-Ghazālī with earlier figures, such as the Muʿtazilī Muʿammar, whom we mentioned above. As a corroboration to his theory, Frank sees al-Ghazālī’s comments in the *Mīyār* on the use of the term “accident” by his *mutakallimūn* colleagues as possible indicators of his belief in more than one class of *jawhar*. See *al-Ghazālī*, 53 (top). More will be said of this below.

⁵⁴ For example, see *Qawāʿid*, 136.

ing strongly suggests that these texts leave little room for ambiguity and reveal that, at least as far as his *kalāmī* psychology is concerned, al-Ghazālī may well be regarded as an Ash'arī, using standard Ash'arī atomism to explicate the common Sunni creed. The question of the soul's true nature he will not entertain in these works, but he does make it plain that right belief dictates that one believe in a soul that is bound by material constraints, as indeed are all created things.

Frank's reading and resulting speculation thus seem to miss the mark, to make too much of too little—building doctrines based on what al-Ghazālī does *not* say. As a counterpoint, we suggest that the absence of any attribution of volume to the *jawhar* may be due to the fact that al-Ghazālī simply thought it redundant to posit both space-occupying (*mutaḥayyiz*) and volume (*ḥajm*) in the same text, for authors often refrain from explicitly stating what is taken for granted. Such an omission can hardly be considered a significant departure from his teacher, al-Juwaynī. In any case, we are cautious to draw conclusions based on what an author does not say.

Turning to the position of Professor Nakamura, we encounter a similar tendency to overlook context and genre when examining aspects of al-Ghazālī's thought, and here we will pay particular attention to his evaluation of al-Ghazālī's theory of the soul.⁵⁵ Conceding that the *Iqtisād* is a perfect representative of "the atomism of traditional Ash'arism",⁵⁶ he invokes passages from the *Tahāfut* to cast doubt on the extent to which al-Ghazālī actually believed in the Ash'arī atomic psychology. The texts he selects from the *Tahāfut*, however, simply show that a full consideration of the (Ash'arī) atomic psychology vis-à-vis the philosophical psychology would take long and intricate argumentation, too long and too intricate for al-Ghazālī's purpose in writing the book. Nakamura himself is forced to admit that the selected texts cannot be taken "as clear evidence that al-Ghazālī was critical of atomism itself and forsook that dogma, but" he continues, "he might have felt that the theory of traditional atomism was going bankrupt".⁵⁷ This disjunction is more an anticipation of other, non-*kalāmī* texts than it is a reflection upon the *Tahāfut*. And that is well, for—even if we found *Tahāfut* passages that were

⁵⁵ See Nakamura, "Was Ghazālī an Ash'arite?", esp. 12–21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

far more compelling than the rather unpointed ones he presents—we will show in the next chapter just how unreliable the *Tahāfut* is as an example of al-Ghazālī's true position on anything.

This final point holds for the one statement in the *Tahāfut* that expresses an openness to the philosophers' belief in "the soul's being a self-subsistent substance",⁵⁸ a statement that Nakamura rightly notes is ruled out by a subsequent statement in the *Iqtisād*. Nakamura goes on to raise one of the central questions of our own study: namely, whether or not the *Iqtisād* truly reflects al-Ghazālī's personal position on the nature of the soul. He is right to note the tension between the *kalāmī* and non-*kalāmī* texts within al-Ghazālī's corpus, but whether or not he resolves it correctly is a question that we cannot answer in this chapter, for it will depend upon a careful weighing of several texts from a different genre, texts that will be considered in the fourth and fifth chapters. Still, it is helpful and relevant to include his hypothesis here, so that we may bear it in mind as we journey forward.

In short, Nakamura follows Ibn Ṭufayl's lead and accuses al-Ghazālī of upholding a double or two-faced confession in the case of the soul's true nature: one official (Ash'arī) atomic confession for the general public and a private (philosophical) confession that he saved exclusively for the elite. Comparing al-Ghazālī's psychological stance to his theory of "optimism" in this respect, Nakamura writes,

The teachings expressed in the *Iqtisād* seem to be his official viewpoint as an orthodox theologian on behalf of the common people and the theologians . . . we may conclude that Ghazālī had two standpoints from a fairly early period: one was the official view of Ash'arism and the other was the teachings for the elite (for example, physical and sensuous pleasures and pains in the Hereafter belong to the former, and intellectual and spiritual joys and griefs to the latter, in contrast to the philosophers who deny bodily resurrection). That is to say, Ghazālī officially supports the traditional Ash'arite view of the soul, while he is inclined privately or unofficially to the philosophical view of the soul (though not in philosophical terms) . . .⁵⁹

He seals his argument with the suggestion that this second, elite, unofficial, philosophical psychology is none other than that of Ibn Sīnā,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

as articulated in his “*Risāla fī maʿrifat(i) al-naḥs al-nāṭiqa wa-aḥwālī-hā*”⁶⁰ among other places. Nakamura thus suggests that the only real difference between the two thinkers, on a private level, is a difference of terms.⁶¹ In other words, while al-Ghazālī’s psychological positions continue to be articulated in Ashʿarī technical terms, the meanings or intentions of these terms may have shifted from the standard Ashʿarī materialist meanings to non-standard definitions that conform to the immaterial psychological and eschatological positions of Ibn Sīnā. While al-Ghazālī cannot be shown to have adopted the philosophical terminology, Nakamura suggests that his adoption of the Avicennian positions was complete.

Although a detailed consideration of Ibn Sīnā’s psychological and eschatological theories fall outside the scope of this study, we will give serious attention to al-Ghazālī’s understanding and refutation of Ibn Sīnā’s positions on the soul and the afterlife in very next chapter. For the time being, we can neither affirm nor dispute Nakamura’s reading of non-conventional meanings within conventional terms, but we are wise to bear it in mind as we proceed.

At least as far as the face-value of al-Ghazālī’s *kalām* is concerned, we seem to have won some clarity: al-Ghazālī upholds the traditional Ashʿarī atomic model—not just for the soul, but for the entire created universe, including the soul.⁶² On this point, we are in agreement with Prof. Nakamura. One might think, then, that our riddle is on its way to being solved. Our investigation of these dogmatic texts, however, has done little more than return us to the beginning, for we must remember that al-Ghazālī himself cautions his reader against overstepping the limits of any science. And the science of *kalām*, he says, while being useful for disputing heretics and for confirming basic belief, has nothing to do with the investigation of the true natures of things. Again, in *the Book of Knowledge*, he writes

⁶⁰ Taken from his *Aḥwāl al-naḥs* (Cairo: ʿisā al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1952), p. 183.

⁶¹ Nakamura, 19–20.

⁶² Indeed, there are many other areas in which his “Ashʿarism” can be seen, if by Ashʿarism we mean a theological (*kalām*-based) adherence to the doctrines of occasionalist causality, *kasb*, the creation of the universe (in time) ex-nihilo, the reality of “seeing” God, and the belief that the Divine attributes are additional to the Divine essence. These, in addition to his unwavering advocacy for the other traditional articles of faith and the requirements of the Revealed Law, suggest a *general* yet strong affiliation with the “school” of the Ashʿarīya, especially in relation to his *kalām* writings. Such an affiliation would never preclude the presence of unique

As for *al-kalām*, its purpose is the protection of the articles of faith, which have been passed down by the people of the *Sunna* from among the righteous forbears—and no others. Anything beyond that [in the *kalām*] is seeking to unveil the true natures of things (*kashf haqā'iq al-ashyā'*) in an improper way (*min ghayr tarīqihā*). The purpose of safeguarding the *Sunna* is to attain, through a concise belief, a limited degree of [*kashf*], which is the extent to which we have laid it out in the *Kitāb qawā'id al-'aqā'id* from the entirety of this book [i.e., from the entire *Ihyā'*].⁶³

Similarly, as we saw in the first chapter, he can be even more stern when it comes to putting the practitioners of the *kalām* in their place:

Of religion, the theologian (*al-mutakallim*) has nothing save the creed that he shares with the rest of the common people, [the] creed which belongs to the actions external to the heart and the tongue. He only is distinguished from the common person through the craft of argumentation and protection.

As for the [servant's] gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God—be He exalted—and His attributes and acts and all to which we point in the knowledge of the Unveiling, it is not attainable through the science of *kalām*. On the contrary, *al-kalām* is almost a veil [draped] over it and a barrier [keeping one] away from it. Rather its attainment is by way of concerted striving [in the way of God] which God—be He magnified—has made a preliminary to guidance inasmuch as He—be He exalted—said, “and those who strive for Us, We will surely guide them in Our ways. Surely God is with those who work righteousness” [29:69].⁶⁴

Thus, from his own admission it would follow that searching the dogmatic works for esoteric truth is a futile exercise, for *al-kalām* is a totally inappropriate forum for such investigations. Indeed, we must begin our investigation again on more fertile soil, where the true natures of things may be discussed, albeit sometimes in a way that withholds more than it reveals. After examining his critique of the

insights, formulations, and other novel non-*kalāmī* features present within his corpus, particularly in works of a non-*kalāmī* nature. This holds for many of the Ash'ariya, both before and after him, who were theologians and thinkers in their own right and not merely uncritical vessels of al-Ash'ari's teachings. If, however, we were to define the term more narrowly as a *kalām* “school” committed to the speculative explication and development of the creed, a project that al-Ghazālī censures as an abuse and misuse of *al-kalām*, then we would have to count him out.

⁶³ *Al-'ilm*, 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

philosophical formulations of the soul and the Afterlife, we will turn to works that employ the “heart” as their primary psychological idiom, a shift of terms that signals a shift of genre, from common belief and the venture of philosophy to the experiential knowledge of the Unveiling.

CHAPTER THREE

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S CONDEMNATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY IN THE *INCOHERENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS* (*TAHĀFUT AL-FALĀSIFA*)

Our investigation now turns to al-Ghazālī's encounter with philosophy, which he claims in the *Munqidh* to have studied once he had realized the limitations of *al-kalām* as a means of attaining truth. While there is more than one work in this genre that deserves our attention,¹ we will focus here on the work in which al-Ghazālī treats the question of the human soul in greatest detail: *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, a work of tremendous erudition composed sometime before his escape from Baghdad and after his disillusionment with philosophy as a means for attaining his ultimate aim. It should be stressed here that our primary aim in this chapter not to present Ibn Sīnā's psychological and eschatological positions in their own right but rather to examine al-Ghazālī's understanding of these positions and his reactions to them. While his overall stance here is one of refutation and sometimes even condemnation, he nevertheless summarizes and explicates the thought of Ibn Sīnā with remarkable balance and precision.

Although he stresses that the work is not written to formulate or affirm any particular position, either theological or philosophical, we will note in places the presence of positive Ash'arī assertions, such as his recourse to an "occasionalist" theory of causality in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth discussions. In spite of these, he maintains that the *Tahāfut* is written to refute certain philosophical

¹ Aside from the *Tahāfut*, two works are worthy of mention here: the *Standard for Knowledge* (*Mīyār al-'ilm*), which is an exposition of Ibn Sīnā's logic written as an appendix to the *Tahāfut*, and the *Aims of the Philosophers* (*Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*), a general summary of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy as a whole. Although the preface and conclusion to this second work convey the same overall disapproval that is clearly articulated in the *Tahāfut*, the body of the text seems to predate both the preface and the conclusion and has the character of a personal workbook in which al-Ghazālī summarized and worked through the thought of Ibn Sīnā in stolen hours during his early years of teaching and writing at the Niẓāmīya in Baghdad.

views that he deems both dangerous and baseless for two reasons: i) they challenge crucial doctrines within the Islamic creed; and ii) the “demonstrations” by which the philosophers claim to have proven their necessity do not hold up. Chief among these are the philosophical doctrines of death and the afterlife, teachings that bring the true nature of the human spirit to center stage. The author’s preface and four introductions provide valuable keys for the proper reading of the text, keys that open open the doors of al-Ghazālī’s primary motivation for writing the text, the nature of the text itself, and the carefully defined scope of the author’s agenda. A clear understanding of these points will prove essential as we work through his main arguments about the soul later in this chapter.

In the Preface he tells the reader that his primary motivation in composing the work springs from sense of personal outrage over the arrogance of a group of philosophizing Muslim intellectuals and from a resulting social concern:

I have seen a sect who believe themselves to be distinguished from their contemporaries and colleagues by reason of a superabundance of cleverness and intelligence; they have rejected the [daily] worship duties of Islam and have looked down upon the religious rites of the [prescribed] prayers and the guarding against the forbidden things; they have made light of the devotions [prescribed by] the Religious Law, as well as its limits, and they have not desisted at its prescribed limits and restrictions. On the contrary, they have thoroughly repudiated the noose of religion through some of the arts of [their] opinions, in which they take after a group that turns away from the cause of God and seeks a twisted deviation. “And in the afterlife they are the unbelievers”.²

This highbrow attitude, while annoying and ill-conceived in his view, poses less of a menace than does their attitude toward religion, which attacks the very fabric of society and affronts all those who submit to the religious laws and doctrines. He restates this in the following paragraph:

The source of their infidelity is [in] their hearing stupendous names such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their likes, and [in the] exaggeration of [certain] groups from among the followers [of these philosophers]. And their [moral] deviance lies in their description of the intellects [of these ancients],³ in [their belief] in the soundness

² *Tahāfut*, 37.

³ Literally, “their intellects.” Hereafter in the quotation, I give boldface type to

of **their** fundamental principles, in the precision/accuracy of **their** astronomical, logical, natural, and metaphysical sciences, and in **their** monopoly on superlative intelligence and astuteness through the extraction of these hidden things. And [it is] through their appropriation [of this knowledge] from **them** that they are, [in accord] with the calm self-possession of **their** intellects and with the copious abundance of **their** merit, deniers of the legal proscriptions and the creeds (*al-nihal*) and rejectors of the details of the religions and confessional communities, for they believe that [all these details] are composed laws and embellished devices. When that struck their hearing and their natural disposition concurred with what had been reported of the doctrines [of the ancients], they became enamoured with the belief in infidelity. [And this was by way of their] inclining toward the floods of the erudite (according to their claim) and joining their way, deeming themselves above the support of the masses and the common people, and scorning [their state] of satisfaction with the religions of their forefathers, and supposing that showing the apparent cleverness in desisting from an uncritical acceptance (*taqlīd*) of the Truth by engaging in the uncritical acceptance of something futile is a noble thing, while being unaware that the movement from one form of uncritical acceptance to another is [mere] stupidity and confusion.⁴

This deep concern over the intellectual vulnerability of the generality of believing Muslims is further emphasized in the concluding passage of the Introduction:

[All] this is concomitant with the narration of their school of thought from its own perspective, so that these heretics will come to see [how] an uncritical acceptance [of religion] is really in agreement—on every significant point, from start to finish—with the faith in God and the Last Day and [how] the differences of opinion [all] go back to details that are external to these two [primary] axes, for the sake of which the prophets were sent, [being] those who confirm [the truth] with miracles. No one ever entered into the denial of these two [fundamentals] save a small and insignificant group possessing backward intellects and inverted opinions, people to whom no attention should be paid nor any importance given in matters [discussed] among the [real intellectuals] engaged in speculative thought (*al-nazar*). And [these insignificant deniers] are not counted except among the host of demons and the corrupt, and among the torrents of the foolish and the gullible.

the possessive pronoun (Arabic pronominal suffix) denoting the ancients and not the misguided intellectuals targeted by the author. Obviously, an unembellished translation of the original text would be, in this case, dizzying to a reader unfamiliar with the larger context of the argument.

⁴ *Tahāfut*, 38.

[This is said] in order to protect from his [own propensity toward] excess the person who supposes that to adorn oneself with infidelity in an uncritical way indicates the soundness of his view . . .⁵

In summary, al-Ghazālī is worried about the individual who will be dazzled by ancient names and duped by the elitist attitude of the philosophers, a view which turns out to be just another form of uncritical belief that smacks of self-aggrandizing and self-delusion. This passage states powerfully his primary motivation in writing the work: to prevent vulnerable minds from adopting such a haughty and, in al-Ghazālī's view, foolish attitudes toward themselves and especially toward religion.

All of these sentiments—and particularly the pastoral concern for the weak-minded majority—run throughout the entire corpus of his works and are very clearly echoed at every point of his career, even in his autobiography, where he returns to his discussion of philosophy within the context of the various classes of seekers.

It is customary with weaker intellects thus to take the men as the criterion of the truth and not the truth as the criterion of the men. The intelligent man follows 'Alī (may God be pleased with him) when he said, "Do not come to know the truth by the men, but know the truth, and then you will know who are the truthful." The intelligent man knows the truth; then he examines the particular assertion. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker is a truthful person or not . . . It is only the simple villager, not the experienced money-changer, who is made to abstain from dealings with the counterfeiter. It is not the strong swimmer who is kept back from the shore, but the clumsy tiro; not the accomplished snake charmer who is barred from touching the snake, but the ignorant boy . . . It is therefore necessary, I maintain, to shut the gate so as to keep the general public from reading the books of the misguided as far as possible . . .

Wherever one ascribes a statement to an author of whom they approve, they [i.e., the majority of mankind] accept it, even though it is false; wherever one ascribes it to an author of whom they disapprove, they reject it even though it is true. They always make the man the criterion of the truth and not truth the criterion of the man, and that is erroneous in the extreme. This is the wrong tendency towards the rejection of the ethics of the philosophers.

But there is also a wrong tendency toward accepting it. When a man looks into their books, such as the Brethren of Purity and others, and sees how, mingled with their teaching, there are maxims of the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

prophets and utterances of the mystics, he often approves of these, and accepts them and forms a high opinion of them. Next, however, he readily accepts the falsehood they mix with that, because of the good opinion resulting from what he noticed and approved. That is a way of gradually slipping into falsehood.

Because of this tendency it is necessary to abstain from reading their books on account of the deception and danger in them. Just as the poor swimmer must be kept from the slippery banks . . . just as the boy must be kept from touching the snake . . . Indeed, just as the snake charmer must be kept from touching the snake in front of his small boy, . . . and must caution the boy by showing caution [when treating the snake] in front of him, so the first-rate scholar must act in a similar fashion . . .⁶

In his effort to salvage what good there might be in the method and ethics of the philosophers, he cautions the average reader possessing an anti-philosophical sentiment against reading the works of the philosophers; and, in his effort to keep the weak mind that is well-disposed toward things and personages connected with philosophy, he cautions against giving general access to philosophical books. Later in the same work, he says that many have been deceived by the philosophers who publicly profess the faith and show up for Friday prayers but take, at the same time, the Revelation (*al-sharʿ*) into their own hands, rationalizing the ways in which it does not really apply to them (not being of the common ilk for whom the Religious Law is meant to be binding).⁷ All this is in keeping with what we may call the paternalistic or even pastoral tone we find in the introductions to the *Tahāfut*, a tone that reveals his primary motivation in composing the work.

In the famous (and brief) third introduction, al-Ghazālī carefully delineates the aims and the limits of the project at hand:

Let it be known that the aim [of this work] is to caution anyone whose belief is well-disposed toward the philosophers and who deems their methods to be free of any contradiction. [This will be achieved] by showing the many aspects of their [internal] breakdown. Thus, for that [end], I only oppose them in the way of one seeking to dispute, not as one claiming to establish [counter claims].⁸

⁶ *Al-Munqīdh min al-ḍalāl* (translation from Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 40–44).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁸ *Tahāfut*, 43.

The work never claims to be about asserting the truth; rather, it is about validity and possibility—i.e., the validity of conclusions claimed by the philosophers to be demonstrable and their pretense that there exist no competing possibilities, a pretense that presupposes the unasailable truth of their premises. This is what al-Ghazālī is setting out to refute, and he will do this, he goes on to say, in a purely eclectic, utilitarian manner.

I stir up and make muddy what they believe [to be true] absolutely, [and I do this] by means of several methods of making [certain conclusions] stick; sometimes I force upon them the arguments⁹ of the Mu‘tazila, and other times the arguments of the Karamīya, and at times the arguments of the Wāqifiya. I do not set out to defend any particular school of thought; rather I fashion all of the sectarian schools (*al-fraq*) into a single band against them. It might be that the rest of the *fraq* differ with us in detail, but these [philosophers] are opposing the foundations of faith; and so let us come together against them, for, in times of adversity, enmity goes [away].¹⁰

Thus, he tells us, he is willing to adopt any position that achieves his end, and he claims to lean in no way toward any theological or doctrinal school. Whether or not he succeeds in maintaining a stance free of any doctrinal bias may be called into question in the course of our study, but still his introductory remarks are clear: this work is not about anything of a constructive or affirming nature; it is about tearing down. And the tools that he employs in the process—at least theoretically—are chosen with the sole criterion of utility.

Not an anti-rationalist by any stretch of the imagination, al-Ghazālī is obviously not setting out to refute *all* of the philosophical doctrines embraced by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Indeed, he judges much of their intellectual tradition, including logic and the natural sciences,¹¹ to be beneficial to the work of religious scholars, such as the jurists (*fuqahā*) and the *mutakallimūn*. He makes this clear in the second introduction, where he explains that there are three types of intellectual differences between the philosophers and their counterparts. Of these, al-Ghazālī says, it is only the third type that pushes the philosophers outside the parameters of the believing community.

⁹ Literally, the “doctrine (*madhhab*) of the Mu‘tazila”.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See M.E. Marmura’s “al-Ghazālī’s Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic” in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, George F. Hourani, ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1975), 100–111.

The first type of difference results from equivocal terms, such as *jawhar*. The philosophers, he says, call the Fashioner of the Universe a *jawhar*, but this can hardly be found blameworthy since, “according to their interpretation, the *jawhar* is an existent not in a substrate—i.e., the self-subsisting [entity] that does not stand in need of a formative agent which would establish it in existence.” Thus, he says, “they do not mean by it something occupying space, as their enemies do”.¹² Thus, when their terminology is considered from their own perspective, it does not in any way oppose the religious beliefs of the community. The question over whose definition is the right one requires linguistic research, he says, and, ultimately, all questions concerning the religiously appropriate use of particular terms fall upon those specializing in the exoteric application of the Religious Law: the *fuqahā*. This is because “a research concerning the permissibility of calling [s.th.] by a true expression whose meaning is in accord with that which is signified by it is similar to the research concerning the permissibility of some certain action.”

The second type of disagreement concerns “that which does not clash in principle with the foundational principles of religion,” such as the philosophers’ scientific understanding of solar and lunar eclipses. “Opposing them in [these matters] is not,” he says, “required by the belief in the prophets and the messengers (God’s blessings be upon them)”.¹³ Indeed,

there is no point in demonstrating the futility of this. Whoever supposes that arguing to prove the futility of this is [a duty resulting] from religion has committed a crime against religion and has weakened its case, for astronomical, mathematical demonstrations, in which there remains no doubt, are based upon these phenomena. If it were said to one who has carefully studied these things and verified their [natural] indicators—by which he is able to predict the time of the two eclipses, their [respective] degrees [of totality], and their [respective] periods of duration up to their passing away—that [all] this was in opposition to the Revealed Law, he would not be skeptical about it; rather, he would be skeptical about the Revealed Law. Indeed, the damage [done] to the Revealed Law by the one who seeks to assist it in an improper way (*lā bi-ṭarīqihī*) is greater than that done by one

¹² *Tahāfut*, 41–43. As we saw in the previous chapter, he is referring here to the Ash‘arī doctrine of the soul as *jawhar* (atom).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

who attacks it in its proper way. Just as it is said, “an intelligent enemy is better than an ignorant friend”.¹⁴

A few paragraphs later he concludes, “the greatest thing from which the heretic takes pleasure is when a patron of the Religious Law declares that [all] this and its like are in opposition to the Religious Law.”¹⁵ Thus, with science al-Ghazālī has no quarrel.

However, he says that there are philosophical doctrines that do indeed come into irreconcilable conflict with the fundamental principles of religion; specifically, he singles out their rejection of the belief in the world’s creation in time, their denial of God’s knowledge of particulars, and their refutation of the belief in bodily resurrection. These, then, are the specific doctrines that he sets out to refute in the *Tahāfut*. Although each of these philosophical positions warrants a full consideration in its own right, only the last of them concerns us now, for it is intimately tied to our investigation of his understanding of the nature of the human soul, a nature which must necessarily be the same in this world and the next. Hence, our treatment of the *Tahāfut* skips ahead from the introductions to the last three discussions, especially the eighteenth in which he refutes their “doctrine that the human soul is a self-subsisting substance (*jawhar qā’im binafsihi*) that neither has body nor accident”.¹⁶

It is worth noting that most of this chapter does not in fact set out to disprove the existence of an immaterial, self-subsisting soul; rather, it sets out to prove that such a position cannot be reached by reason alone. This gives rise to a profound ambiguity detectable in the discussion, an ambiguity that we will try to clear up later in the study.

The eighteenth discussion opens with a concise but accurate explication of Ibn Sīnā’s psychology, a summary that quickly focuses upon the internal perceptive faculties shared by all animals: namely, the “imaginative faculty” (*al-quwwa al-khayālīya*), the “estimative faculty” (*al-quwwa al-wahmīya*),¹⁷ and the “active imagination” (*al-quwwa*

¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43. See these sentiments echoed in the *Munqidh* (Watt, trans.), 79.

¹⁶ *Tahāfut*, 46.

¹⁷ For a brief but insightful summary of al-Ghazālī’s somewhat unidimensional reading of Ibn Sīnā’s theory of “estimation”, see D. Black, “Estimation (*wahm*) in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions” in *Dialogue*, vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), 219–258, esp. 220–223. We will revisit this article with greater attention in the course of this chapter.

al-mutakhayyila), which in humans is called the “cogitative faculty” (*al-quwwa al-mufakkira*). In both animals and humans, this last faculty “arranges the sensed images, one with another, and aligns the [various] images with the [corresponding] forms/images. It is in the intermediate cavity (*al-tajwīf al-awsaṭ*) between that which preserves the images and that which preserves the meanings [associated with them] . . .”¹⁸

Al-Ghazālī goes on to explain that, according to this philosophical psychology, the power that receives the impressions from the senses and the power that preserves them (after they are no longer being perceived by the senses) cannot be one and the same. Thus, the imaginative faculty is comprised of two subfaculties—the receiving and the preserving. This also holds for the estimative faculty, which also must receive and preserve, not images but the intentions associated with the images. Thus, when all of the internal perceptive senses are identified, they correspond perfectly with the number of external senses, five for five.

After discussing the internal senses, al-Ghazālī takes a little time to explain the motive faculties,¹⁹ which divide into two main categories: that which induces desire, also called “the faculty of desire and yearning” (*al-quwwa al-nuzū‘īya wa’l-shawqīya*), and that which is the actual physical cause of motion, also called “the active motive faculty” (*al-quwwa al-muḥarrika al-fā‘ilīya*). That which induces desire, he says, branches in turn into two: the appetitive (*al-shahwānīya*) and the irascible (*al-ghaḍabīya*). For, when a desirable or a repulsive image is imprinted upon the imaginative faculty, the faculty of desire and yearning induces the active motive faculty to effect some kind of motion. If the imagined object is perceived as being necessary or beneficial, then the appetitive faculty desires it and induces the active faculty to approach it; if the imagined object is perceived as being injurious or ruinous (*mufsid*) the irascible faculty seeks to overpower or defeat it. This somewhat complex coordination of the subfaculties belonging to the faculty of desire and yearning results in the function or activity (*al-fī‘l*) called “will”.

As for the faculty [that is] motive in the sense that it effects [action], it is a faculty that is triggered in the nerves and muscles. Its business²⁰

¹⁸ *Tahāfut*, 207.

¹⁹ The following is a paraphrase of p. 208.

²⁰ Or “function” (*sha’nuhu*).

is to cause the muscles to contract, and so it either pulls the sinews and the ligaments connected with the limbs toward the locus in which resides the faculty [so as to draw the desired object closer] or it causes them to slacken, extending them lengthwise so that the sinews and ligaments go away from the direction [of the faculty's locus].²¹

With this explanation, he concludes his summary of Ibn Sīnā's animal psychology. What remains to be explained is that segment of the philosophical psychology that pertains exclusively to humans. This is, of course, Ibn Sīnā's understanding of the rational soul. Al-Ghazālī writes,

As for the human rational soul—called "*al-nāṭiqa*"²² by them, for intended by this term is "the intellectual" (*al-ʿāqila*) because the choicest outward fruit of the intellect is articulate speech (*al-nuṭq*) and thus [the one] is tied to [the other]—it has two faculties: a [theoretical] noetic faculty and a [practical] operative faculty. Each of these is called "intellect" through an equivocal use of the term. The [practical] operative is a faculty which is the principle of movement for the human body, [moving it] toward [the performance] of the ordered occupations [characteristic of] the human, occupations whose order is derived through the discursive thought that is unique to the human. And, as for the [theoretical] noetic, it is [also] called "the speculative" and is a faculty whose function includes grasping the realities of the intelligibles, stripped of [all] matter, spatiality, and direction. [These realities] are the universal judgements, sometimes called by the theologians "states" (*al-aḥwāl*) and other times "modes" (*wujūh*) and are called "pure universals" by the philosophers.²³

Thus, the soul has two faculties, in relation to two sides [of reality]. The speculative [exists] in relation with the side of the angels, since it takes from them the true sciences, and this faculty ought always to be ready to receive [the intelligibles] from above. The operative faculty has a relation to a lower [plane], which is the side of the body, with its management, and the improvement of moral [behaviour]. This faculty ought to reign supreme over the remaining bodily faculties, which [in turn] ought to be guided by its disciplining [of them], subdued beneath it so that it is neither influenced nor affected by them;

²¹ Ibid.

²² I keep the Arabic here so as to avoid redundancy in the English. Literally, this term should be translated as "rational" in the sense that the human being is endowed with speech and discursive thought. Thus "*mantiq*" is the term employed in Arabic for the grammar of thought, i.e., logic, just as the English term "logic" is derived from the Greek *logos*, a noun similarly charged with the nuance of language, speech, order, as well as discursive thought.

²³ Al-Ghazālī rejects this philosophical doctrine of the universal in the tenth proof of the eighteenth discussion (225–227), which we shall treat in due course.

rather those [lesser] faculties are [to be] influenced by it. [This subjugation of the lesser faculties] is so that, from the [side of the] bodily qualities, there do not emerge enslaving dispositions (*hay'āt inqiyādiya*) called “vices” in the soul; rather, [the operative faculty] should be supreme so that, by reason of it, there emerge in the soul dispositions called virtues.²⁴

Al-Ghazālī goes on to say that

There is nothing in what [the philosophers] have mentioned that must be denied in terms of the Religious Law. For these are observed matters which God, exalted be He, has ordained to run in a habitual course²⁵ (*ajrā Allāh al-'āda bi-hā*).

We only want now to object to their claim of knowing the soul to be a self-subsisting substance through rational demonstration. We do not offer against their claim the objection of one who deems this to be remote from the power of God, the exalted, or perceives that the Religious Law has brought forth that which is contrary to it.

Indeed, we will perhaps (*bal rubbamā*) show that the Religious Law gives credence to it in [our] detailing of the explanations of the resurrection and the Afterlife. We deny, however, their claim that reason alone indicates this and that there is no need in it for the Religious Law.²⁶

Thus, he leaves open the possibility of upholding a belief in the rational, immaterial soul within the Islamic legal framework. As he summarizes Ibn Sīnā's psychology, he explains the theoretical/practical division of the rational soul without ever telling his reader that this rational soul is held by the philosophers to be immaterial.²⁷ This

²⁴ *Tahāfut*, 209.

²⁵ This serves as a clear indication that, although al-Ghazālī's explicitly stated intention in the *Tahāfut* is to obfuscate and and refute Ibn Sīnā's doctrines while putting forward none of his own, his Ash'arī positions punctuate the discussion at various points. In this case, it is his Ash'arī “occasionalist” theory of causality, the possibility of which he defends in the seventeenth discussion. It also shows its face in other parts of the work, such as in the final part of the Twentieth Discussion (p. 249). For a thorough explication of al-Ghazālī's use of this phrase, see Michael E. Marmura's review article, “Ghazalian Causes and Their Intermediaries”, 91 ff.

²⁶ Here, I borrow the translation from Michael E. Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 52–3.

²⁷ Ruling out the possibility that al-Ghazālī's intention behind “rational soul” in this specific passage is really an Ash'arī material rational soul, Marmura goes on to explain, “A doctrine of an immaterial soul he proclaims, in effect, is possible and within God's power to enact. Furthermore, it is not denied by the religious law. In fact, one can find support for it in the law. At the same time, there is a note of tentativeness when he suggests that he ‘will perhaps’ indicate this support.” *Ibid.*

apparent openness to the possible truth of their belief (yet not of their methods) comes up more than once in the work.

In the course of his refutation of their claim to have come to these beliefs by pure demonstration and logical necessity, al-Ghazālī treats ten consecutive philosophical “proofs” (*adilla*) or “demonstrations” (*barāhīn*)²⁸ of the soul’s immaterial nature. Each one he explicates and refutes in turn, showing that their proofs and demonstrations yield, in reality, only possibilities and probabilities rather than demonstrative conclusions. With a single exception (the tenth proof), he does not deny the truth of their conclusions; rather, he strives to show that, even though they may be true, their truth is not demonstrable by logical premises and methods alone.

It is not crucial to our discussion to defend Ibn Sīnā against these “refutations”, for it is only al-Ghazālī’s explanation and refutation of these philosophical points that we are after; nor is it germane to examine each of these ten proofs/refutations in detail, for this would go long and would add little to our main discussion in this chapter. However, a close look at a few of the main arguments will prove beneficial by way of further illustrating his explicit agenda in composing the work. More specifically, we will examine the first and the last of these ten, both chosen for their clarity and probing insights into Ibn Sīnā’s psychology and theory of knowledge.

The first of their proofs²⁹ states that, since the cognitions of the mind are limited yet consist of units (*aḥād*) that are themselves indivisible, the receptacle of these units must itself be indivisible. Further, since each and every body is, by definition, divisible, then this receptacle cannot be a body. The argument, al-Ghazālī says, is a sound syllogism—a *modus tollens*—that reduces to the following: If A is divisible, and B is in A, then B is divisible; not B; then not A.

To this, al-Ghazālī presents two objections. The first is simply to ask,

with what would you dispute one saying, “the receptacle of knowledge is a single substance that occupies space and [yet] is indivisible”? [That theory] was known from the Muslim scholastic theologians.³⁰ After [this objection] nothing remains except for them to deem it unlikely . . . and

²⁸ *Tahāfut*, 210.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Particularly the Ash‘arī *mutakallimūn*, about whom more will be said in chapter three.

thinking it unlikely [does them] no good since it could turn upon their position too: namely, “how could the soul be a discrete thing that does not occupy space, cannot be pointed to, that is neither inside nor outside the body and is neither connected to nor separated from it?”³¹

The second objection is tied quite directly to Ibn Sīnā’s psychology, specifically to the estimative faculty, which, as we have seen, is equally present in animals as in human beings (although its function is not the same in both).³² Al-Ghazālī writes,

What you have mentioned to the effect that everything indwelling in a body ought to be divisible is [rendered] absurd for you because of what the ewe’s [estimative] faculty grasps of the wolf’s hostile intention. [You attribute to the ewe] judging a discrete thing, whose division is inconceivable since enmity does not have a part such that one could [simultaneously] cognize it as well as the cessation of [the other] part. According to you, its cognition occurred in a bodily faculty, even though the animal soul is imprinted upon the bodies and [thus] does not abide after death. Upon this [the philosophers] have agreed.³³

Because the animal’s estimative cognition cannot be shown to be divisible or tied to any single sensual observation, al-Ghazālī forces his opponent(s) to concede the indivisibility of the animal soul that contains such a cognition. In other words, for their psychological theory of the estimative faculty to work, the animal soul would have to be indivisible. This, he says, is an inherent contradiction that the philosophers did not detect in their simultaneous affirmation of the indivisibility of knowledge and the materiality/divisibility of the animal soul. There is no way out of this.

Even if one were to offer the objection that the ewe’s apprehension of the wolf’s enmity is really nothing more than a cognition resulting from specific sense (visual) data and not an abstract, rational cognition, “purified of material forms and individuals”, al-Ghazālī says that one could counter with the question, “with what does it apprehend [the enmity]?” If the hostile intention of the wolf were recognized by a bodily faculty, he says, then it should be divisible, which does not make sense:

³¹ Ibid., 210–11.

³² According to Black, al-Ghazālī’s critique envisages the estimative faculty “primarily as an animal power, or at least, pertaining only to the practical activities shared by both humans and animals . . . its epistemological applications are ignored altogether.” See “Estimation . . .”, 221 ff.

³³ *Tahāfut*, 211–12.

what is the state of that cognition if it is divided? How could there be “part” of it? Is it a cognition of “part” of the hostile intention [harbored by the wolf for the ewe]? How then could [the hostile intention] have a part? Or does each division of the cognition [partake] in the whole of the hostile intention so that the hostile intention is known multiple times through the anchoring of its cognition in each and every division of the receptacle?³⁴

This, he says, remains an inherent problem in their alleged “demonstration”, for “either what they have mentioned concerning the rational soul or what they have mentioned concerning the estimative faculty” must give. Further, he says, “this contradiction reveals that they were unaware of the place of the confusion in the syllogism,” which perhaps lies in their assertion that “knowledge is imprinted upon the body in the [same] manner that color is [imprinted] upon its object.” Perhaps, he suggests, the relation between the knower and the thing known is of a different nature, and the philosophers just made use of an inappropriate parallel. Although it appears that al-Ghazālī is giving them the benefit of the doubt, it becomes clear in his refutation of the next “proof” that the problem is inescapable.³⁵

As he ties up his counterarguments to this first philosophical proof, he reminds the reader that his objection is not with the philosophers’ doctrine of the soul *per se*; rather it is with their assertion of how their knowledge is won. He writes,

In short, it is not denied that what they have mentioned is among the things³⁶ that make [their view] probable and strengthen [one’s] belief [in it]³⁷ (*yaqwī al-zann wa yaghlibuhu*). What is [here] denied is its being known with a certain knowledge without possibility of error and without recourse to doubt. This extent [of their claim] is what is doubted.³⁸

Leaving the questions surrounding the estimative faculty and raising new questions concerning the philosophers’ theory of knowledge, the tenth and final philosophical proof in this discussion rejects outright

³⁴ Ibid., 212.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Literally, “among that which gives . . .”

³⁷ For sheer readability, I have reversed the verbal order in my translation. Also, in reference to al-Ghazālī’s use of the term *zann* in this passage, it is uncertain whether he is using the term in a technical or idiomatic way. Our sense of his usage in this context is idiomatic, but it is ambiguous enough to warrant some consideration.

³⁸ *Tahāfut*, 213.

the philosophical definition of universals, specifically the “general intellectual universals (*al-kullīyāt al-‘amma al-‘aqlīya*) that are called ‘states’ [by] the scholastic theologians”.³⁹ Such universals include “the intelligible, absolute human being”—abstracted beyond any and all particularities of color, shape, locus, dimension, etc.—which the philosophers understand to be “the reality of the human being”, a form utterly unrelated to the particular individual from which it was first abstracted. Rather, the philosophers argue that, once abstracted, its only relation is to “that which abstracts⁴⁰ [it], which is the rational soul (*al-nafs al-‘aqlā*)”.⁴¹ And, since the abstracted universal is entirely free of all particularity or materiality, so too must the rational soul, its receptacle, be entirely free of all material, spatial constraints.

Al-Ghazālī, however, while not denying the representational universality of the image in the mind, refuses to deny the connection between the intellectual form and the particular from which it was first abstracted. Thus, the mind’s representative “universal” is, for him, not to be confused with the “universal meaning” (*al-mānā al-kullī*) posited by the philosophers.

Only that which inheres in the [faculty of] sense can inhere in the intellect. However, [the particular] inheres as a collective thing in the [faculty of] sense, the [faculty of] sense being unable to differentiate [its parts]. But the intellect is capable of differentiating [its parts].

Then, once it has been differentiated [according to parts], the differentiated [particular], detached in the mind from the connections [to its various components], exists, in its being something particular,⁴² like something connected through its connections [to the particular individual from which it was abstracted]. However, that which is established in the intellect corresponds equally⁴³ to the intelligible thing (*al-ma‘qūl*) and to [other] things similar to it.⁴⁴

Thus the connection is not severed; it is rather generalized to include all members of the same species. This is the only sense in which the intellectually abstracted form can be called a universal, he says. Simply put, the mind keeps a particular image as a kind of archetype that, while not perfectly resembling all particulars in its class,

³⁹ Ibid., 225.

⁴⁰ Literally, “that which takes [it] (*al-ākkidh*) . . .”

⁴¹ *Tahāfut*, 225.

⁴² Literally, “in its being a particular thing”.

⁴³ Literally, “corresponds in [the manner of] a singular correspondence to . . .”

⁴⁴ *Tahāfut*, 226.

can still serve as a standard and thus represent all of the particulars in its class.

This is more than a mere subtle departure from the philosophical definition of the universal, and it is enough to refute the philosophical statement that the universal in the mind is a separate reality totally independent of the material particularities from which it was initially abstracted, a statement that makes a case for the immateriality of the soul in which it resides. By countering their position with an equally plausible theory of intellectual abstraction, a theory which does not deny the continuing particularity of the mental archetype, al-Ghazālī shows that their theory is not the only viable explanation of the nature of the “universal” that comes to dwell in the rational soul.

Moving forward now, the Nineteenth Discussion refutes the philosophical doctrine “that nonexistence is impossible once human souls have existed and that they are everlasting, their annihilation being unthinkable”.⁴⁵ It consists of two philosophical “proofs”, the first of which is assailed by four objections and the second of which is refuted with a single objection.

The first proof states that, in order for a soul to be annihilated, one of three things must logically happen: “(i) the body dies and causes the death of the soul; (ii) a contrary or opposite entity nullifies the soul; or (iii) the soul is annihilated through the power of the One Possessing Power (*bīqudrati ’l-qādir*)”.⁴⁶ In the idiom of Ibn Sīnā, he refutes each possibility in turn, thus showing—from a philosophical vantage point—that the human soul cannot suffer annihilation.

The first of these would only hold, he says, if the souls were imprinted upon the bodies. Such is the case with “the bestial souls and bodily faculties,” as we saw in the previous discussion. This, however, cannot pertain to the human soul, say the philosophers, for it enjoys an act in which the body has no share whatsoever:

grasping the intelligibles abstracted from material things. In its being a perceiver of the intelligibles, it has no need of the body; on the contrary, its preoccupation with the body impedes it from [apprehending]

⁴⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁴⁶ While this form of the active participle is rendered in the literal sense, it is saturated with Qur’ānic nuance, for it is the standard attribute referring to God as “the Omnipotent”. In this context, al-Ghazālī seems to be using it in both the plain grammatical sense and the religious sense; hence the literal rendering coupled with the use of capital letters.

the intelligibles. As long as it has an act independent of the body and an existence independent of the body, it does not need the body for its subsistence.⁴⁷

In other words, its self-subsistence is verified by the fact that its highest function does not in any way depend upon the body and its faculties.

To this, al-Ghazālī poses a familiar objection. As we saw in the last discussion, their psychological “proof” for the independence of the rational soul is problematic, for it would have to include certain estimative functions of the animal soul as well, such as the ewe’s estimative perception of the wolf’s harmful intention. However, the self-subsistence of the souls of sheep is something they categorically deny. Therefore, having already shown this, al-Ghazālī refuses to allow their argument here.

The second of these three possibilities for the annihilation of the soul is likewise impossible, according to the philosophers, for the human soul is a substance (*jawhar*), a single indivisible atomic unit, and it is absurd to posit contrariety for indivisible substances, since the phenomena of generation and corruption apply only to

accidents and [composite] forms that are successively coming over things. Thus the form of liquid is wiped out by its contrary, [i.e.,] the form of gas, while the material that is the receptacle [e.g. the cooking pot or jar] is not annihilated at all. [Regarding] any *jawhar* that is not in a receptacle, its being wiped out by means of a contrary is unthinkable, since there can be no contrary for something that does not inhere within a receptacle. This is because the contraries are successively overcoming [one another] on [the locus of] a single receptacle.⁴⁸

Al-Ghazālī objects to this as well, for

even if it does not, according to them, indwell in a body, it nonetheless has a connection with the body whereby it only comes into existence when the body comes into existence. This is what Avicenna and the exacting among [the philosophers] have chosen.⁴⁹

The relation between each soul and its respective body then is “a particular relation between the particular soul and that particular

⁴⁷ *Tahāfut*, 228.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 228–9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 229. The translation here is from M.E. Marmura, trans. & ann., *al-Ghazālī: the Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 206.

body.” Although the specifying cause of this relation, as well as its modality, are unknown, the exclusive connection between the two is certain. If the modality is such that the soul is imprinted upon the body, then it would follow that the soul must necessarily die with the death of the body. If the connection is other than that,

such that this relation is [still] a condition for its [i.e., the soul’s] coming to be, then what would make it improbable for [this relation] to be a condition for [the soul’s] continuation in existence?⁵⁰ Thus, were the relation to be cut, the soul would cease to be. Thereafter its existence would not return to it except through the restoring act of God—be He praised and exalted—by way of resurrection,⁵¹ just as it has been related in the Revelation concerning the ultimate return (*al-ma‘ād*).⁵²

In short, al-Ghazālī is again arguing for the admission of another possibility, thereby showing that the philosophical “proof” is not air tight. As long as the specific modality of this connection between the particular soul and the particular body remains unknown,

it is not improbable that this unknown relation is of a mode that renders the soul in need of a body for its existence such that, if [the body] is corrupted, [the soul] is corrupted. For with what is unknown, one cannot judge whether or not there is a requirement of concomitance [between this relation and the soul]. For it may well be that this relation is necessary for the existence of the soul, so that, if [the relation] ceases to exist, [the soul] ceases to exist. Hence, one cannot rely upon the proof they have mentioned.⁵³

The third possible mode of annihilation, say the philosophers, is likewise impossible, for nonexistence cannot be considered the fruit of a power. As was explained in the Second Discussion, which treats their doctrine of the world’s post-eternity (*abadīyat al-‘ālam*), there are two philosophical reasons supporting this: (i) for God to create and then to destroy a thing implies some kind of change within the Divine, which is impossible; (ii) power is, by definition, generative

⁵⁰ There is a slight problem with the original text here. Where I place “[the soul’s]” in both the first and second lines, the Arabic expresses this possession by means of a masculine pronominal suffix, whereas the grammatically feminine word “soul”, whether singular or plural, warrants a feminine pronominal suffix. Syntactically, then, one is tempted to read “[the body’s]” rather than my rendering. This, however, goes against the sense of the passage.

⁵¹ Where I translate “resurrection”, the Arabic text gives both *al-ba‘th* and *al-nushūr*, Arabic terms for which we do not have separate English renderings.

⁵² *Tahāfut*, 230.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 231 (again, translation from Marmura, 208).

and creative, while degeneration and annihilation result from a lack or absence of power. The latter argument, he says, is far stronger than the former. So, speaking on behalf of the philosophers in the Second Discussion, al-Ghazālī writes,

[i] It is unthinkable that there could be a cause to which a nonexistent thing belongs. Yet there must be a cause [responsible] for a thing that was once in a state of existence⁵⁴ and then became nonexistent. And that cause can only be the will of the Eternal. But this is impossible, because, if He had not been wishing its nonexistence and then began wishing it, he must have undergone some change . . . [ii] Nonexistence is not a thing, so how can it be [considered] an act [of God]? If He wiped away the universe, thus renewing the act of “it was not”, what would that “act” be? Is it the existence of the universe? [This] is impossible, since existence has been severed. Or is His act the nonexistence of the universe? But the nonexistence of the universe is not a thing—[having nothing to speak of] so that it may be considered an act. Indeed, the least, most miniscule grade of action is that it be existent, and the nonexistence of the universe is not an existent thing so that it may be said of [it], “it is that which the [Divine] Agent enacted and which the Originator brought into being”.⁵⁵

He goes on to give objections from the various schools of the *kalām*, including two different Ash‘arī perspectives, one of which is worthy of special note. According to this group (*tā’ifa*),

The accidents pass into nonexistence by themselves while the atoms (*jawāhir*) pass into nonexistence because God does not create in them movement or rest or adjunction [to other *jawāhir*] or separation. It is impossible for a body to remain [in existence] when it is neither still nor moving; hence, it becomes nonexistent. It is as if the two Ash‘arī groups both incline toward [the view] that becoming extinct is not [brought about] by reason of an action [of God]. Rather, it is by reason of [God’s] refraining from action, since they cannot conceive of nonexistence as an act.

If these ways [of explaining the extinction of the world] come to nothing, then no possibility remains for the [truth of] the statement that the annihilation of the world is a possibility.⁵⁶

Al-Ghazālī explains that, while agreeing with the philosophical insistence that nonexistence cannot be considered an act, the Ash‘arīs

⁵⁴ Literally, “that which had not been an annihilated thing”, i.e., that which had been an existent thing.

⁵⁵ *Tahāfut*, 83–4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

can still explain how the annihilation of the world is possible. This is rooted in Ash‘arī occasionalism, which attributes the the moment-to-moment continuation of all existence to the moment-to-moment free choice and act of God. If at any point He freely chose to refrain from all or part of this action, nonexistence would necessarily ensue.

Al-Ghazālī then turns toward the related question of the soul. Speaking now about the philosophers, he says,

[All] this [stands] if it were posited that the universe is created (*hadīth*). Moreover, in light of their conceding [the point regarding] the creation of the human soul, they argue [for] the possibility of its extinction by way of an argument⁵⁷ that comes close to what we have mentioned.

In essence, according to them, every self-subsistent thing cannot be [considered to reside] within a receptacle. Once it exists, its extinction is inconceivable regardless of whether it is pre-eternal (*qadīm*) or created. If it is said to them, “whenever fire burns beneath water, the water passes into nonexistence,” they say, “it was not annihilated; it was [rather] transformed into vapor and later [back into] water. Matter, which is prime matter, continues to exist in the atmosphere, and it was the matter which was in the form of the water; then it discarded the liquid form and took on the form of gas. Then, were cold to come into contact with the atmosphere, it would become dense and would be transformed [again] into water. Nothing of matter is renewed; rather materials are shared by the various elements. Indeed, the forms [temporarily taken by matter] are [all] that is exchanged”.⁵⁸

Then al-Ghazālī goes on to give a somewhat abbreviated refutation of these arguments:

What you have said [divides into] divisions. If it were possible for us to defend every one of them and show each one’s futility according to your own principle, it would not be enough to include [all] your principles according to what [is entailed in] each one’s category. However, we will not prolong [the discussion] and will thus confine ourselves to [the refutation of] one.

We say: with what [argument] would you deny one who says, “creation (*al-ījād*) and annihilation (*al-īdām*) are [both realized] through the will of the One Possessing Power (*al-qādir*)”? Thus, if God so wills, He brings into being, and, if He so wills, He annihilates; that is the meaning of His being endowed with power (*qadīr*) over everything. And, in all of that, He does not undergo any change within Himself. Rather, it is the act that undergoes change.

⁵⁷ Literally, “by way of a route (*bi-ṭarīq*) . . .”

⁵⁸ *Tahāfut*, 86.

As for your statement, “some kind of act must issue forth from the Agent, so what is issuing from Him [in the case of His rendering something nonexistent]?” We say: that which is [being] reinstated is issuing from Him, and that is [the state of] nonexistence. For nonexistence was not, and then nonexistence was reinstated, and thus it issued from Him.

If you say, “but ‘it’ isn’t anything, so how can ‘it’ issue from Him?” We say: “it isn’t anything, so how can ‘it’ occur [in the first place]? The meaning of ‘its issuing from Him’ is only that whatever occurs must be ascribed to His power. Thus, if its occurrence is thinkable, then why is its ascription to [His] power unthinkable? What is the difference between you and the one who, from the outset, denies the fresh reinstatement⁵⁹ of [the state of] nonexistence in the case of accidents and forms and says, ‘nonexistence is nothing.’ So how can it become fresh [again] and how can it be described by [the terms] ‘becoming new’ and ‘renewal’”? We do not doubt that the fresh becoming of nonexistence is conceivable with regard to accidents. For, in the case by what is described by [the term] ‘fresh becoming’, its occurrence is thinkable regardless of whether it is called a thing or not. Thus the ascription of that thinkable occurrence to the power of the One Possessing Power is also thinkable.⁶⁰

He goes on to raise a final objection that puts forward a two-fold refutation, all pointing to the conclusion that, “no matter how one conceives the occurrence of a created thing (*hādīth*) through an eternal will, the modality (*hāl*) [of the occurrence] does not divide between [the ontological considerations of] whether the occurring thing is existent or nonexistent.”⁶¹

Returning now to the question concerning the possibility of the soul’s passing away in the Nineteenth Discussion, al-Ghazālī’s argument can be summed up as follows: any occurrence, regardless of whether it brings forth existence or nonexistence, can occur by means of a power, and so it is with the creation and annihilation of the soul. Thus, the passing of a soul from existence into nonexistence is conceivable and possible, in spite of what the philosophers argue. And its very possibility shows that their demonstration is not logically binding. This is all he needs and wants to clarify.

⁵⁹ This is an unusual usage. The form *ṭarīyān* seems to be serving as the verbal noun for the verb, *ṭarīya*, which is in this context synonymous with *tajaddada* (“to be made new”).

⁶⁰ *Tahāfut*, 86–7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Al-Ghazālī's fourth and final objection to the initial argument of the philosophers is extremely straightforward and needs no explanation. He writes,

The fourth objection is to say: you have mentioned that these three [possible] ways [of bringing about] the soul's nonexistence are exhaustive, for it is conceded [by your own argument]. What proves that these are the only three ways of conceiving the thing's nonexistence? Indeed, regarding the enumeration [of these possibilities], if it does not [merely] revolve between [the thing's] denial and affirmation, it is not improbable that it would exceed three and [even] four [alternatives]. Perhaps there is a fourth and a fifth way for [bringing about] nonexistence in addition to what you have mentioned. For the limitation of [possible] ways to these three is not something [that you] arrived at by demonstration.⁶²

Al-Ghazālī then presents a second proof on their behalf, and this, he says, is the one "on which they rely".⁶³ Briefly, the philosophical argument here branches into two arguments, both of which stand upon premises that al-Ghazālī rejects. The first of these is the premise that "the soul is simple (*baṣīṭa*), a form purified of matter, having no composition within it [whatsoever]".⁶⁴ And, since nonexistence can only be posited in reference to some material form for whom nonexistence is a possibility, it follows that the soul cannot tolerate even the potentiality for nonexistence. The second, conceding the materiality of the "*jawhar*" of the soul, is the premise that the fundamental atom, being indivisible as well as both pre and post eternal, cannot ever suffer annihilation or pass away into nonexistence.

For [matter] is sempiternal (*azalīya*) and everlasting (*abadīya*). However, forms come over it and pass away from it, and within it [there] is the capacity (*quwwa*) [for] the fresh generation of forms [coming] over it and the capacity for the passing away of forms from it, for it is equally receptive of both contraries. It is evident, then, from [all] this that, for each and every existent that is singular in essence (*aḥadi 'l-dhāt*), nonexistence is impossible.⁶⁵

Thus the soul, being utterly simple or singular in nature, must be eternal. Having already refuted the philosophers' insistence upon the

⁶² Ibid., 231–232.

⁶³ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Tahāfut*, 233.

eternal nature of matter in the first and second discussions, he rejects their premise outright, without having to explain again his reasons for doing so.

The Twentieth Discussion opens with a lengthy and disarmingly sympathetic explication of the philosophical position on the Afterlife. He goes to some length in explaining their reasons for exalting the intellectual pleasures above all other forms of pleasure⁶⁶ and their association of worship and Lawful living with the purification of the soul and the weakening of the soul's attachment to the world.⁶⁷ In these areas, his tone is positive, even supportive. For example, when speaking of the superiority of the intellectual pleasures, here on behalf of the philosophers, he writes in such a way that the reader might easily mistake him for an advocate of these philosophical views. He writes,

Thus the intellectual, otherworldly pleasures are preferable to the sensual, this-worldly pleasures. If that were not [the case], for what reason did God's Apostle—may God bless him and grant him salvation—say, “I have prepared for My righteous servants that which no eye has seen, nor ear heard, [that which] has not [ever] occurred to the heart of any human”? And [for what reason did] He—be He exalted—say: “No soul knows what is hidden of [the things which] are a delight for [the] eyes”? This then raises the need for knowledge, the most beneficial [aspects] of which⁶⁸ are the pure, intellectual sciences: that is, the knowledge of God and His attributes and His angels and books; the manner of the [coming into] existence of everything⁶⁹ from Him; and anything else⁷⁰ that [serves as] a means to [such knowledge].⁷¹

Indeed, with the exception of the one doctrine to which he takes great objection, namely their denial of all sensible imagery pertaining to the pleasures and torments of the Hereafter, he seems to agree with most of what the philosophers say about the nature of the higher forms of felicity and about the role of religious piety in liberating of the soul.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 235–38.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 240.

⁶⁸ Here I paraphrase slightly, cutting out the redundant construction, “*min jum-lāthi*” (“of its entirety”), thus converting a second sentence into a relative clause.

⁶⁹ Literally, “the things” (*al-ashyā*).

⁷⁰ Literally, “whatever is beyond [all] that”.

⁷¹ *Tahāfut*, 237–8.

We say: most of these things are not in contradiction to the Revealed Law, for we certainly⁷² do not deny that there are in the next world [various] kinds of pleasures [that are] greater than those perceived by the senses (*al-mahsūsat*), nor do we deny the continuation of the soul once [it has] quit the body. On the contrary,⁷³ we know this through the Revealed Law, since it has related [information] concerning the Return, which can only be understood in terms of the soul's continuation. However, we have previously disputed with them their claims of knowing⁷⁴ [all] that by reason alone.

But, from among [these things], that which contradicts the Revealed Law is the denial of the resurrection of bodies, the denial of bodily pleasures in Paradise and of bodily torments in Hell, and the denial of the [real] existence of Paradise and Hell as is described in the Qurʾān.⁷⁵

In these passages, al-Ghazālī seems to agree with most of what they assert about the next world, but still he cannot accept what they deny in reference to the rewards and punishments described in the Qurʾān. He continues, arguing for something of a middle ground between the extremely literal/textual belief and the extremely rational/philosophical belief.

What is preventing [us] from affirming a union between both [kinds] of happiness, the spiritual and the bodily, and likewise with [both kinds of] misery . . .? Just so, the existence of these noble things does not [necessarily] point toward the negation of other [things]; on the contrary, the coming together of both is more perfect, and that which was promised [by God] is the most perfect of things. Now [this combination] is [logically] possible, and so believing in it is required in accordance with the Revealed Law.⁷⁶

While it may be argued that such statements are conceded just for the sake of argument in the *Tahāfut*, we will come to appreciate the candor of this final statement in the following chapters. In addition, when he speaks here about the continuation of the soul after death—we must remind ourselves here that he is speaking on behalf of the philosophers—he neglects to mention that the soul, in this philosophical

⁷² “Certainly” here is intended to reflect the emphatic tone of *fa-innānā* . . .

⁷³ In the English, I give the disjunction greater punch. Literally, it reads “but we know this . . .” I think the context pushes the simple disjunction beyond its ordinary usage here.

⁷⁴ Normally, we render “*maʾrifā*” as “gnosis”. Here, however, as in a few other places, al-Ghazālī uses it in a verbal sense, meaning “knowing” or “grasping”.

⁷⁵ *Tahāfut*, 240–1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

context, is an immaterial soul, a point that he apparently doesn't deem to be problematic, at least not here. All of these points taken together leave the careful reader with questions: does he then himself believe in an immaterial soul that reunites with the body for an eternal afterlife? If so, what is the nature of the connection between the immaterial soul and the material body? And what about the ontology of the bodily pleasures and torments in the afterlife? Are they ontologically real, in which case the hereafter must needs be a physical "place"? or are they imaginative constructs, having no basis but in the mind?⁷⁷ These ambiguities and questions are never fully resolved in the *Tahāfut*, and so they remain with us as we look elsewhere for answers.

Returning to his refutation of their proofs denying the resurrection of bodies, which he says above is possible, he explains that they understand such a thing to be conceivable in only three ways:

[Regarding the first] it is said: "human being" is an expression for the body and life, which is an accident subsisting therein, as some of the theologians have taken it [to mean]. [And it is said] that the soul, which is self-subsisting and is the manager of the body, has no existence [whatsoever], and the meaning of death is the severing of life [from the body], that is, the Creator's refraining from His own [act] creating [life]. In this way, [life] ceases to exist and so too the body. The meaning of the return [in this case] is God's restoration of the body, which had ceased to be, and His returning it to the [state of] existence, and the restoration of the life which had ceased to be. Alternatively, it is said, the matter of the body remains as earth, and the meaning of the return is that [God] collects [it] and assembles [it] in human form and creates life in it anew. This is one type [of explanation].

[Regarding the second way] it is said that the soul is existent and abides after death; however, the original body is returned with all of those very same [atomic] parts. This is [another] type [of explanation].

[Regarding the third way] it is said, the soul is returned to the body just the same regardless of whether [it] is from those parts or from others, and the one returning is that [particular] person by virtue of [the fact] that the soul is that [particular] soul. Thus, as for the matter [constituting the body], no consideration is [given] to it, since the

⁷⁷ These questions are implicit in Marmura's reading: "The soul, hence, must survive the body if resurrection is to take place. But what kind of soul is this? Is it material or immaterial? Al-Ghazālī does not specify. In what follows, however, he chooses to defend a theory of bodily resurrection that also upholds a doctrine of an immortal soul. This fortifies the impression that he is subscribing to a doctrine of the soul's immateriality in conjunction with material resurrection." See "On Bodily Resurrection", 54.

human being is not a human being by reason of it; on the contrary, [he is a human being] by reason of the soul.

These three types [of explanation] are false [they argue].⁷⁸

Although al-Ghazālī lays out philosophical refutations for each of these three theological “proofs” arguing for the possibility of the soul’s return to an embodied state, we will examine only the case of the third way of here. We do this for two reasons: i) it is the only philosophical “refutation” for which al-Ghazālī gives a detailed counter-refutation, and ii) it is the most relevant to our investigation.

In his explication of the philosophical objections to this understanding of the “Return”, al-Ghazālī writes,

this is impossible on two sides. The first is that the matter receptive to generation and corruption is limited to the region below⁷⁹ the sphere of the Moon; and any excess [beyond this limit] is impossible for it. For it is finite while the [number of] souls that have been separated for eternity is unlimited. Thus, [the matter] cannot [adequately] meet the need.

The second is that earth does not receive the management of the soul as long as it remains [common] earth; rather, there must be [some] blending of elements in such a way so as to resemble the blending of the embryo. Indeed, wood and iron do not accept such⁸⁰ management, and so it is impossible for the person to be restored while his body is [formed] out of wood or iron. Nay, he would not [even] be a person unless his bodily members divide into flesh and bone and the [four] humors.⁸¹ Whenever the body and the temperament are ready to receive a soul, it necessitates [the creation of the soul] through the principles [that] grant to the souls the creation (*hudūth*) of [another] soul. Hence, two souls would successively come upon one body [one by natural necessity and the other by God’s restoration of a pre-existing soul to a fresh body].

By this [argument] the [doctrine of] transmigration is proved false. And this [third] position is the very essence of [the doctrine of] transmigration, for it reduces to the soul’s occupation with the management of another body⁸² after it has rid itself of the [first] body. The course that indicates the falsification of the [doctrine of] transmigration [then] indicates the falsification of this course [of explaining the return].⁸³

⁷⁸ *Tahāfut*, 242–3.

⁷⁹ Literally, “the hollow of the Sphere of the Moon”.

⁸⁰ Literally, “this management”.

⁸¹ Usually consisting of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

⁸² Literally, “another body other than the original body”. I abridge the original to avoid redundancy in the English.

⁸³ *Tahāfut*, 245–6.

This then is his account of the philosophical “proofs” attacking the theological assertions supporting the belief in the return of the immaterial soul to a body of some kind after death. He now goes on to give an interesting counter-refutation of the philosophical objections. He writes,

with what [argument] do you deny one who chooses the final [i.e. third] type [of explanation], who regards the soul [as] remaining after death, [as] a self-subsisting *jawhar*? [That is to say, one who sees all] that as being in harmony with⁸⁴ the Revealed Law, in light of His statement, “Do not count those who have been killed in the way of God for dead; nay, they are living in the presence of their Lord,” and in [light of] his statement (upon him be peace), “the spirits of the righteous are in the crops of green birds that perch [on boughs] beneath the throne.” [All this has been evidenced] by what has been related of the reports regarding the sensations of the spirits, [sensations] of acts of almsgiving and charity, the questioning of Munkar and Nakir, the torment of the grave, and other [things], all of which point to the remaining [of the soul after death].

Yea, nevertheless, it has been indicated that the Resurrection and the Gathering thereafter is the Resurrection of the body, and that is possible by virtue of [the soul’s] return to some kind of body, regardless of whether it is [composed] from the matter of the original body or from other [matter] or from matter whose [initial] creation has been resumed.⁸⁵ For he [i.e., the human being] is he by virtue of his soul, not by virtue of his body . . .

As for your second claim [of this being] impossible by virtue of the fact that this is transmigration, then [we argue], there is no [point in] wrangling about terms. For one must assent to what the Revealed Law has conveyed. So let it be transmigration; moreover, we [only] deny transmigration in this world. As for the Resurrection, we do not deny it, regardless of whether it is termed “transmigration” or not.⁸⁶

This passage reflects a remarkably open posture to the possibility of both the soul’s immateriality and self-subsistency. Neither, he claims is contrary to the Revealed Law, for neither precludes the possibility of the soul’s return to the body for an eternal, embodied Afterlife, as is promised in the Qur’ān and in the teachings of the Prophet.

⁸⁴ Literally, “as not opposing the Revealed Law.” While true to the the intention of the original, my rendering has reoriented the statement for the sake of readability and clarity.

⁸⁵ Apparently suggesting the possibility of a second chapter of creation *ex nihilo*, a possibility to which he refers again just a few lines below (in a passage not included here).

⁸⁶ *Tahāfut*, 246–7.

While we acknowledge the fact that he warns us against taking any statements in the *Tahāfut* as positive affirmations of any doctrinal position, we cannot help but wonder here if this passage indicates an authentic openness to the belief in an immaterial soul.

The final philosophical objection in this discussion centers not on the theory of the soul but rather on the question of causality. More precisely, the objection concerns the plausibility of God's creating a second body for each person in a manner wholly separated from the conditions that we observe to be the natural prerequisites for the formation of a human body. Such a "restoration", they argue, would go against the laws of nature—laws or "habits" eternally set in place by God. Al-Ghazālī's refutation of this objection draws on an Ash'arī position concerning Divine power and causality, a position initially explicated in his refutation of the eternity of the world (in the first part of the book) and one to which he refers several times throughout the work.

Returning to the question of the soul, while these somewhat open-ended statements regarding the immateriality and the self-subsistency of the soul seem to be advanced in good faith, the reader must take them all with a grain of salt, for (as we have already seen) al-Ghazālī explicitly states that he is writing the *Tahāfut* as "one seeking and disputing [the positions of the philosophers], not as one making claims [or as] one seeking to substantiate [his own beliefs]".⁸⁷ It is still possible, however, to identify some theological (*kalāmī*) biases (such as the Ash'arī occasionalist position on causality) surfacing throughout the work, and so we can venture that some of the *Tahāfut* at least is reflective of at least one genre of his own thinking.

Thus, while the psychological statements highlighted in this chapter cannot be taken automatically or uncritically as genuine affirmations of any dogmatic position regarding the true nature of the human soul, they do generate a greater degree of ambiguity regarding his position on the immateriality and self-subsistency of the human soul, especially when we compare statements here with his dogmatic formulations highlighted in the previous chapter. Is his openness to certain aspects of the philosophical psychology in the *Tahāfut* purely for

⁸⁷ From al-Ghazālī's third preface to the *Tahāfut*, 43. We have already seen, however, that he sometimes indulges himself by putting forward an Ash'arī position when describing or explicating the Revealed Law. See also Marmura, "Bodily Resurrection," 46, 50.

the sake of argument? We cannot say, at least not yet. Before we can truly begin to work out a hypothesis regarding his authentic stance vis-à-vis the philosophical psychology, we must consult another genre of works, opera that employ the “heart” as their primary psychological idiom. This shift in terminology signals a transition to another genre, and so we move now from the dogmatic defenses of the theologians and the discursive arguments of the philosophers to the rather elusive accounts of a knowledge imparted by an experience of “the Unveiling” (*al-mukāshafa*). Though often veiled and always fragmentary, these references—when collected and pieced together—make up a body of text that we may call al-Ghazālī’s “truth discourse”. In other words, we now turn to his most intimate discussions of the realities of things.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HEART (*AL-QALB*) AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S MYSTICAL DISCUSSIONS OF THE SOUL

We now move into al-Ghazālī's more speculative, theoretical discussions on human nature, and the majority of these are found scattered throughout the voluminous *Ihyā'*, beginning with the very first book and concluding with the very last. More specifically, we will be looking closely at three *Ihyā'* texts in the course of this discussion: namely, the *Book of Knowledge* (*Kitāb al-'ilm*), the *Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart* (*Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*), and the *Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (*Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba'dahu*).¹ And, no sooner do we enter into the first of these than one of the core verities asserts itself: whatever else this true human nature may be, it is and must be rational. Al-Ghazālī's numerous statements in the *Book of Knowledge* are very clear on this point. Early on in the book, in his explication of the "Virtue of Teaching", he tells us that

It is not hidden that the religious sciences, i.e., the *fiqh* of the next world,² are grasped through the perfection of the intellect and the purity of the intelligence. Now the intellect is the noblest of the human being's attributes, as its [forthcoming] explication will bring [forth], since through it the trust (*amāna*)³ of God is accepted and through it one can attain [the station of] proximity to God, be He praised.

And as for the all-pervasiveness of [its] benefit, it is not subject to doubt: for its benefit and fruit is the felicity of the next world.

As for the nobility of [its] receptacle (*al-maḥall*), how can it be hidden when the teacher treats the hearts and the souls of people? [This] class of humanity [form] the noblest existent on earth, and the noblest

¹ This, of course, does not mean that our discussion will be limited to these texts, for other relevant texts, such as the *Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving*, the *Book of Love, Yearning, Intimate Friendship, and Contentment* and the *Book of Contemplation*, will also be brought forward in the course of this chapter.

² It should be noted how careful he is here to clarify that, by the "religious sciences", he intends an inner jurisprudence, a science of spiritual formation, and not the sciences more commonly represented by the term.

³ This usage of "trust" implies something entrusted to humanity: a responsibility, sacred duty.

part (*juz'*) from among the *jawāhir* of the human being is his heart. The teacher is the one occupied with its perfection, its [complete] exposure, its purification, and its direction toward the [ultimate] proximity to God—be He mighty, sublime.⁴

In the course of this passage, he shifts without hesitation or transition from “intellect” (*aql*) to the term “heart” (*qalb*) in such a way as to give his reader the impression that the two terms are being used interchangeably. Upon closer examination, however, the “heart” appears to refer to the seat or “receptical” of the “attribute” of intellect. If this reading is correct, then we may wonder if the heart is physical and whether or not it is capable of housing other attributes (or faculties) as well, such as the imagination. He sheds no further light on the heart’s nature in this passage, however, and so the reader is left with dangling questions concerning the precise nature of the heart and its relation to the intellect, questions that will resurface time and again and will ultimately be answered by the *Book of Knowledge* and its sister books of mystical Unveiling in the *Ihyā'*. As is already becoming clear, al-Ghazālī’s answers typically are the kind that beget new questions; for example, the heart is referred to in this passage as a “part” (*juz'*) of the *jawāhir* that make up the person: a reference that, if understood in the context of the *kalām* terminology examined in the second chapter, implies that the heart is a single atom. Is this what he intends, or is there some equivocity at work in this non-*kalāmī* context? We will endeavor to sort out such puzzles as we explore more thoroughly his position on the heart’s true nature in this chapter and the ones following.

Earlier in the same book, in the section devoted to “the Virtue of Knowledge”, he recalls the words of Faḥ al-Mawṣilī: “does not the sick man die when food and drink are withheld from him for three days? . . . So too the heart, if wisdom and knowledge are withheld from it for three days, it will die.” Al-Ghazālī then adds,

he spoke truly. Wisdom and knowledge are the nourishment of the heart, and through them [it takes] its life, just as food is the nourishment of the body. The heart of the one who has lost knowledge is sick and its death is certain.⁵ However, he will not sense [the heart’s sickness and imminent death], since love of the world and his preoccupation with it paralyze his [inner] sensations.⁶

⁴ *Al-ʿilm*, 22.

⁵ More literally, “necessary” (*lāzim*).

⁶ *Al-ʿilm*, 15.

In these and countless other passages, the heart is not treated in a bodily way, and knowledge—its “food”—is depicted as the means to eternal life and the stuff of eternal happiness. Early on in the *Book of Knowledge*, he corroborates this further by saying,

if you look into knowledge, you will see it as something enjoyable in itself, and you will find it [to be] a means to the abode of the next world and its felicity and [also to be] a means to the [station of] proximity to God—be He exalted. One cannot attain [this proximity] save through [knowledge]. Now eternal felicity is the greatest thing properly belonging to the human being (*fī haqqi 'l-adamī*), and the most excellent thing is that which is the means to it. And one shall not attain [such felicity] save through knowledge and works (*al-'ilm wa'l-'amal*); [of course,] one can only get to works through the knowledge of how [they are to be performed].⁷

The term “knowledge”, then, is used to mean both the practical and theoretical dimensions of the the Science of the Way of the Afterlife. These two kinds of knowledge stand in a hierarchical relationship to one another: the theoretical clearly superior to the practical while being, at the same time, dependent upon it. This is a crucial point of interdependence that he makes again and again throughout the *Ihyā'*,⁸ and it provides a framework in which to better understand the relation between the respective sciences of Right Practice and of the Unveiling. The latter, being the more theoretical, is certainly deemed superior to its praxis-oriented sister, and yet it is, at the same time, absolutely dependent upon it. This dependence is not completely one-sided, however, as there are also key points in the science of Right Practice, he says, that cannot be grasped save through a measured dose of the Unveiling.⁹ Such areas, however, are relatively few and far between. We will touch upon the relation between these two interdependent ways of knowing again as the study unfolds.

Turning now to the nature of the intellect, which is the seat of both the practical and theoretical sciences, al-Ghazālī provides some

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ And it is an observation shared by many scholars of al-Ghazālī. For example, see Umaruddin's *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī* (Lahore: Sh.M. Ashraf, 1962, 1970), esp. 102–111 and 260-end. In a way, the entire book is a detailed explication of this single point. Also, see Lazarus-Yafeh, 359–363.

⁹ See, for example, his statement in *Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul (Ihyā'*, vol. V), 118, where he explains that “some of the sciences of the Unveiling have a direct bearing on works, through the mediation of the [knowledge of] the states, and only through them can the science of Right Practice be made perfect.” This may also be the makings of an argument for the necessity of a shaykh in Sūfī formation.

clarification near the end of the book, specifically in the seventh chapter, “On the Intellect: Its Nobility and Reality and Divisions”:

Know that this is among the things which do not require one to take pains in bringing it to light, especially in light of the fact that the nobility of knowledge was made clear in respect to the [noble nature of the] intellect. The intellect is the spring and starting point of knowledge [as well as] its foundation, and knowledge flows from it as the fruit comes from the tree and light from the sun and vision from the eye. How then can that which is the means for felicity in [both] this world and the next not be honored? Or how can it be doubted when [even] the beast, with [all] its shortcoming in discernment, becomes timid [before] the intellect, to the extent that even the greatest of beasts in terms of size and the most severe in terms of [inflicting] harm and the most powerful in terms of attack will, when it sees the image of a human being, become timid [before] it and be afraid of it . . .¹⁰

He continues in this vein, mentioning how the primitive nomads among the Turks, Kurds, and Arabs will naturally respect their leaders (*mashāyikh*) by virtue of their vast experience, which al-Ghazālī calls the “fruit” of the intellect. And so he comes to the rebellious Arabs (*al-muʿānidūn*), who initially came to the Prophet with the intention of killing him:

When their eyes fell upon him they rejoiced¹¹ at [the sight of] his gracious countenance; they were in awe of him, and there appeared to them that which was glimmering on the ornament of his face of the light of prophecy, even though that was an inner thing (*bāṭin*) within his soul,¹² hidden within [him] in the same way the intellect [is hidden within the soul].¹³

Very striking here is the close comparison made between the prophetic light and the intellect. Does this suggest that prophecy is an *intellectual* phenomenon? Such a suggestion would mean that al-Ghazālī’s understanding of prophecy has an undeniable resonance with that of Ibn Sīnā, who argued that the highest form of prophecy was intuit-

¹⁰ *Al-ʿilm*, 108.

¹¹ More literally, “their eyes were beautified with *kuhl* . . .” In this context, the usage is idiomatic, vividly expressing the joy on the faces (esp. in the eyes) of the Arabs.

¹² This could easily be rendered less technically as “his self” in light of the fact that the term *nafs* is equivocal and can be taken in either way. The context here, however, seems to warrant the more technical, psychological rendering. I thus opt for “soul” over the more reflexive “self”.

¹³ *Al-ʿilm*, 108.

tive, i.e., an immediate and total intellectual grasping of the intelligibles.¹⁴ As we will see in the course of this chapter, such parallels or points of resonance between the two thinkers abound. For now, we will hold off on further elaboration but will bear these points in mind as we journey further into the *Ihyā'* and related texts. In addition to all this, al-Ghazālī's identification of the intellect with the sun and knowledge with light is highly suggestive given his frequent employment of light as a symbol for mystical truth.¹⁵ The rest of the above passage serves to corroborate what we have already seen regarding the superior role played by the intellect in the attainment of true felicity, both in this world and the Hereafter.

As the discussion on the nobility and true nature of the intellect continues to unfold, al-Ghazālī seems to be drawn increasingly toward a more mysterious and less defined estimation of the intellect. Following immediately on the heels of the passage quoted above, he writes,

The nobility of the intellect is grasped by necessity. However, our purpose is to relate what has been conveyed by the Reports and the [Qur'ānic] *āyāt* concerning the mentioning of its nobility. God—be He exalted—called it “light” (*nūr*) in His utterance, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth; a semblance of His light is as a niche . . .”¹⁶ And the knowledge that is acquired from [this intellect] is called a spirit (*rūh*), a revelation (*wahī*), and a life (*hayāh*), for He—be He

¹⁴ The Avicennean doctrine seems to have its roots in al-Kindī's description of prophetic knowing *vis-à-vis* philosophical knowing, with additional nuance derived from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. For Ibn Sīnā's formulation, see his Arabic *De Anima*, F. Rahman, ed. (London: Oxford, 1959) 248–50, also summed-up in Rahman's translation of the psychological portion of *Kitāb al-najā(t)* entitled, *Avicenna's Psychology* (London: Oxford, 1952), 35ff.; for al-Kindī's earlier and somewhat rougher formulation, see his “Risāla fī kammīya(t) kutub Aristūṭālis wa mā yuḥtāju ilayhi fī taḥṣīl al-falsafa” in *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīya*, ed. Abū Riḍā' (Cairo: 1950/1369), esp. 372–3. Al-Ghazālī's Avicennean leanings in his explication of prophecy show themselves again in the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, 119.

¹⁵ See Lazarus-Yafeh's chapter on the “Symbolism of Light in al-Ghazālī's Writings”, 264–348, where she argues for the Neoplatonic character of this common motif in his writings. Of course, as we have already seen, the metaphor is also easily traced to the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions.

¹⁶ Of course, al-Ghazālī's intended audience needed little more than the first few words of any given *āya* to know the fuller reference, and so, for readers unfamiliar with the passage to which he refers, I will provide a slightly “fuller” reference here and in the following notes: “. . . in which there is a lamp, the lamp encased in glass; the glass as if it were a pearly star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, [a tree] whose oil is about to burst into light, though no fire has touched it. Light upon light, God guides whomsoever He wills to His light. And God strikes semblances for the people, and of all things God is knowing.” *Al-Nūr* (24): 35.

exalted—said, “And just so did we reveal to you a spirit from Our command . . .”¹⁷ and He—be He praised—said, “or is the one who was dead, whom We revived and for whom We fashioned a light by which he would walk among the people . . .”¹⁸ Wherever He mentions light and darkness, He intends [by these expressions] knowledge and ignorance [respectively]. [This is] exemplified in His statement, “He brings them out of the [various kinds of] darkness and into the light . . .”¹⁹ And [the Prophet], may God bless him and grant him salvation, said . . .”²⁰

For the sake of brevity and concision, we will skip over his citation of this next Tradition; however, even as we do so, we must stress the preponderance of such citations in his writings. Al-Ghazālī goes to considerable length to include relevant Qur’ānic texts and Prophetic traditions, even ones that are of weak narration. These efforts can be seen, even in esoteric contexts, as tokens of his uncompromising support of the traditional Sunni creed and way of life. A few lines down, then, he continues:

And he [i.e. the Prophet], may God bless him and grant him salvation, said, “the Intellect is the very first [thing] created by God. He said to it, ‘approach’, and it drew nigh; he then said to it, ‘turn away’, and it turned away; then God, be He mighty, sublime, said, ‘by My might and My majesty, I did not create [anything] more noble [in my sight]²¹ than you. Through you I take, and through you I give; through you I reward, and through you I punish.”

If you were to say, “if this intellect is an accident, then how could it have been created prior to the bodies? And, if it were a *jauhar*, how

¹⁷ To finish the *āya*, in which two distinct voices can be detected and in which the primary voice calls the Qur’ān itself a “light”, “. . . ‘you did not know [before] what the Book was, nor what Belief [was], but we made the Qur’ān a light by which to guide whomsoever We will from among Our servants.’ ‘Surely You guide [us along] the straight way.’” *Al-Shūrā* (42): 52.

¹⁸ “. . . [is he] like unto the one whose kind is in the [various kinds of] darkness, never emerging from them? Such is the pleasure of the ungrateful; they were not in the know.” *Al-An’ām* (6): 122.

¹⁹ His citation is actually taken from the middle of the *āya*, and so we will cite it here in its entirety: “God is the Guardian of those who believe; He brings them out of the [various kinds of] darkness and into the light. And [as for] those who are ungrateful [to God], their patrons are evil; [for] they lead them from light into the [various kinds of] darkness; those are the companions of the fire, in which they [remain] forever.” *Al-Baqara* (2): 257.

²⁰ *Al-‘ilm*, 108. Many of these same *āyāt* are used in his explication of the highest meaning of “guidance” (*al-hidāya*) in the *Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving* (*Kitāb al-ṣabr wa’l-shukr*, vol. IV, 368). We may understand, then, that Divine “guidance” is synonymous with the intellect in its most exalted sense.

²¹ Literally, “to me”.

could there be a *jawhar* that is self-subsisting and does not occupy space?”

Know that this [question] is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling. Its mentioning is not appropriate for [our explication of] the science of Right Practice,²² and we purpose now [in writing this work] to discuss the sciences of Right Practice . . .²³

He thus leads himself right into the heart of the trouble and deals with it by avoiding it; given his explicitly-stated intention in writing the *Ihyāʾ*,²⁴ it is well within his rights to do this, but it is both frustrating and tantalizing all the same. As we will see, this is not the last time he will do this; however, each time he brings us to the threshold, he will give us something before he turns us away. Here, he gives us the knowledge that he is very well aware of our question and knows that there is a tension between what he has already explicitly stated in his *kalāmī* texts and what hides within the Unveiling.

Later in the same section, he explains that there is a problem of equivocation in people’s usage of the term, “intellect”.²⁴

Know that people differ in [their] definition (*hadd*) of “intellect” and its true nature, and the majority overlook [the fact that] this term is used for various meanings, and that has become the reason for their disagreement.

The truth is the remover of the veil in [this]: [namely] that “intellect” is a term used equivocally for four meanings, just as the term, “*al-ʿayn*”, for example, is used for numerous meanings, along with [other terms] of this sort.²⁵ One ought not to seek a single definition for all of its divisions; rather, each division should be singled out by uncovering its [unique meaning].

The first is [that] description by which the human being is distinguished from the rest of the animals, i.e., that by which [the individual] becomes prepared to receive the theoretical sciences and to manage those crafts that are rationally-derived and not self-evident (*al-ṣināʿāt al-khafiya al-fikriya*). It is that which al-Ḥārith bn Asad al-Muḥāsibī [d. 243/857] intended where he said about the definition of the intellect, “it is an instinct by which one becomes prepared to grasp the

²² We note here a printing error in the Arabic text: the ج (l) and second م (m) of *muʿāmalā* have been inverted.

²³ *Al-ʿilm*, 109.

²⁴ Indeed, his own usage of the term is not free of equivocation; in various works, we see him using the term to signify very different meanings, all of which he enumerates in the passage rendered here. Contrast his usage of “intellect” and “rational” in the *Munqidh*, for example, with that of the *Kitāb sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb*.

²⁵ Literally, “[other terms] that run in this course”.

theoretical sciences; it is as if it were a light that is cast into the heart, [a light] by which one becomes prepared to grasp everything” . . .²⁶

The second [constitutes] the sciences which arise, joining to the existence of the essence of a child [who can] distinguish [between] the possibility of the possible thing and the impossibility of the impossible thing; such as the knowledge that two are [numerically] greater than one and that a single individual cannot be in two places at the same time. It is that [definition] which some of the theologians have intended with regard to the definition of “intellect” about which [they] said, “it is some of the necessary [self-evident] sciences . . .” It [i.e., this usage] is also correct in its own right, because these sciences are present [in the soul] and are called “an exterior intellecting” . . .

The third [constitutes] sciences that benefit from [worldly] experience with the [natural] outcomes of situations. Hence, whosoever becomes seasoned [by his] experiences and polished [by various] ways of thinking, it is said that he is intelligent in habit . . .

The fourth is that the faculty (*quwwa*) of that instinct [see #1] reaches [the point] where one knows the outcomes of things and subdues and [ultimately] conquers the lustful desire that incites [the soul] to temporal pleasure. Thus, when this faculty is attained, the one possessing it is called “intelligent” (*‘āqil*) . . .²⁷

He thus identifies four distinct meanings: (1) an innate predisposition, capacity or instinct to understand and grasp the theoretical sciences; (2) what might be called the primary intelligibles, or the necessary knowledge that exists in the infant without learning, such as the possibility and impossibility of basic things and the knowledge that two are greater than one; (3) the knowledge that comes as the result of learning and experience; (4) the thoughtful and disciplined disposition of one who has become circumspect in his dealings and has won absolute mastery over the passions. It is worthy of note that this fourth and final definition of intellect assumes a practical mastery over the less rational aspects of the soul, a telling point that reveals his view of knowledge as something more than mere theoretical knowing, something that finds its complete fulfillment in practice.

²⁶ In the section deleted from the paragraph (for reasons of concision), al-Ghazālī clarifies two issues regarding this “instinct”: (i) that it cannot be identified exclusively with the necessary truths, as “the instinct” remains present in the sleeper as well as in the person who is ignorant of the necessary truths; and (ii) that this instinct is unique to the human being *qua* human being and is thus nontransferable to other species. Thus it is not just a case of God’s “habit” (*‘jirā’ al-‘āda*) in creating the sciences in the human mind while not creating them in the mind of the donkey; rather, by “intellect” he intends a faculty or capacity peculiar to the human being.

²⁷ *Al-‘ilm*, 111–12.

These then are the common usages of “intellect”, the first being the most fundamental or basic meaning and the others being more extended or applied usages.²⁸ However, while all of these are valid meanings and usages, they are not necessarily what al-Ghazālī himself always intends when he uses the term. As we will see, his usage is very context-specific. For example, here in the more esoteric context of these final sections of the *Book of Knowledge*, where he discusses “inner vision”²⁹ (*baṣīra(t) al-bāṭin*), the various kinds of intellectual disparity among people, and the loftier levels of inspiration and revelation, his highest definition of the intellect—superceding all of the meanings enumerated above—begins to shine through:

the obvious truth about [the disparity of people’s intellects] is to say, truly the disparity occurs [within each of] the four categories, save for the second category, which is the necessary knowledge . . . As for the three [remaining] categories, disparity occurs [within] them . . .

As for the first [category], which is the foundation (*al-aṣl*), i.e., the “instinct”, there is no way to deny the disparity within it, for it is like a light that dawns upon the soul and brings its morning. The [main] principles of its dawning [come] at the age of discernment; then it continues to grow and increase, gradually progressing in an imperceptible manner, until one comes into maturity near [the age of] forty years. Its semblance is the light of the morning, for its beginning is hidden in such a way that its detection is very difficult. It then gradually increases to the point that the emergence of the [entire] disk of the sun is complete.

The light of inner vision (*nūr al-baṣīra*) varies [in people], just as the light of vision [itself] varies, and the difference [between the various levels] is grasped [more tangibly] between the one afflicted with an eye infection and the one [who is] keen-sighted. Indeed, the customary practice of God—be He mighty, sublime—flows gradually upon all of His creation in reference to [His] bringing [them] into existence, to the extent that [even] the instinct of sexual desire is not manifested suddenly, all at once upon the boy’s coming of age; rather, it becomes manifested little by little, [increasing] gradually. So too with all of the faculties and attributes. Whoever denies the disparity of people in regard to this instinct is like one who has lost control of his mind. And whoever believes that the intellect of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) is similar to the intellect of any one of the common peasants and desert roughnecks is himself more base than any one of [these] peasants.

²⁸ Ibid., 112.

²⁹ Ibid., 113.

How [then] can one deny the disparity of the [intellectual] instinct when, without it, people would not differ in [their] understanding of the sciences, nor would they divide into [the following categories:] a dull-wit who can only understand what is taught to him after the long labor of the teacher; a bright one who understands through [even] the slightest symbol and indication; a perfect [mind] in whose soul arise the realities of things without instruction, just as [God]—be He exalted—says, “. . . whose oil is just about to burst into light, though no fire has touched it; light upon light . . .” That [last description] is like unto the prophets, may peace be upon them, since obscure things became clear to them [from] within their inmost reaches (*fī bawāṭinīhim*), [and this was] without any learning or instruction.³⁰ That [phenomenon] is expressed by [the term] “inspiration” (*al-ilhām*). The Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) gave expression to its like where he said, “verily, the Holy Spirit blew [this] into my mind: ‘love whom you will, for surely you will soon be parting from him; live how you [wish to] live, for surely you will soon be dead; do what you will, for surely you will be rewarded with it.’” This mode [of inspiration by which] the angels make [things] known to the prophets differs from pure revelation (*al-wahī*), which is the hearing of the voice through the sensation of the ear and the eyewitnessing of the angel through the sensation of vision. To that [effect], [the Prophet] informed [them] about this [inspiration of the Holy Spirit] by “the blowing into the mind”. Now many are the degrees of revelation, but plunging into them does not bear on the knowledge of Right Practice; indeed, it is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling . . .

With regard to the knowledge relayed [to us]³¹ indicating the disparity of the intellect is [an account of] what was narrated [concerning the fact that] ‘Abd Allāh bn Salām—may God be pleased with him—asked the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him salvation—in a long conversation about the Hereafter, to describe the grandeur of the Throne (*‘izām al-‘arsh*). [According to this narration, the Prophet said] that the angels said, “O Lord! Hast thou created anything greater than the Throne?” He said, “Yes: the Intellect.” They then said, “and how far does its capacity reach?” He said, “What a question! Its knowledge cannot be circumscribed. Do you have any knowledge of the number of [the grains of] sand?” They replied,

³⁰ Again, al-Ghazālī is extremely close here to Ibn Sīnā’s theory of intuitive prophetic cognition; indeed, the language he employs here is almost identical to that used in passages of Ibn Sīnā and al-Kindī. Like al-Ghazālī, both Ibn Sīnā and al-Kindī equate prophetic intellection with inspiration (*al-ilhām*), and they argue that the prophet’s knowledge comes without his seeking it, without effort, without instruction, without close study, without syllogistic reasoning, and without a long time.

³¹ Here he is referring to the body of knowledge received via the oral and written tradition (*al-naql*), which is the counterpart of the knowledge derived via the intellect (*al-‘aql*).

“Nay.” Then God—be He mighty, sublime—said, “Verily I have created the intellect in various kinds that are like the number of sand [grains]. Among the people [there are] those to whom is given a grain, and those to whom two grains are given, and those to whom three or four are given, and those to whom is given a portion, and those to whom a load is given, and those to whom [even] more than that is given.”³²

He immediately goes on to explain that some of the Sufis have scorned the terms “intellect” (*al-ʿaql*) and “intelligible” (*al-maʿqūl*) due to the adoption of these terms by the scholastic/dogmatic theologians, who popularized a particular signification for these terms and used them in the context of their arguments and debates. The Sufis in question were thus confused as to the true meaning of these terms, he says.

[But] as for the light of inner vision by which God—be He exalted—and the truth of His emissaries are known, how could its disparagement be conceivable when God—be He exalted—[Himself] commends it? If it is reproved, then what after it would be praiseworthy? If that which is praiseworthy is the Revealed Law, then by what [faculty] does one come to know the truth of the Revealed Law? If one comes to know it through the blameworthy intellect, which cannot be trusted, then the Revealed Law [itself] must also be blameworthy. One must not pay attention to the one who says, “Surely it is grasped through the eye of certitude (*bi-ʿayn al-yaqīn*) and through the light of faith, [but] not through the intellect,” for by “intellect” we mean [precisely] what is intended by the “eye of certitude” and the “light of faith”, which is the internal attribute by which the human being is distinguished from the beasts so that through it he may grasp the realities of things.

Most of these [verbal] bashings have arisen from the ignorance of people seeking verities from [linguistic] expressions, and so they clash [against one another] over them due to people’s reckless usages of [such] expressions. This much then is sufficient in [our] explication of the intellect. And God knows better.³³

It need not be argued that this final section of the *Book of Knowledge* is extremely rich. Although most of it speaks for itself, we will highlight a few points and raise a few questions. For example, we may well ask: is this “light of inner vision”, this “light of faith”, this “inner attribute by which the human is distinguished from the beasts so that through it he may grasp the realities of things” the very same

³² *Al-ʿilm*, 114–5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 116.

bodily “accident” for which he argues in the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā'id*? Even at the beginning of the *Book of Knowledge* he still refers to the intellect as a “part from among the *jawāhir*” that make up the human being. Certainly a tension is already growing between his *kalāmī* treatments of the rational soul and these more mystically-oriented descriptions, but we must be careful when comparing genre-specific treatments of one kind with another. Besides, as evidence that he is already quite consciously aware of our questions, we have seen that he simply refuses to entertain them, for their answers reside in the hidden realm of the Unveiling, which is not his explicitly-stated focus here. Having raised the questions, he seems quite content here to leave them as questions lingering in our minds, as tantalizing ambiguities that pine for clarification.

Another tension, and one to which he calls our attention in this passage, stands between the linguistic expressions and the realities they signify. In effect, he cautions his reader against seeking ultimate understandings from literal expressions. Such “ignorance” gives rise to conflict and in no way advances the seeker in his quest for true knowledge. We may take this as a general directive when considering the “knowledge” yielded by the science of the *kalām*, which he admits is bound by linguistic expressions, vis-à-vis the knowledge won through mystical experience. More specifically, we may take this as a pointed reminder as we continue to search for linguistic clues pointing to the true nature of the intellect or heart.

Some further clarification does come, but not immediately and never all at once. Further into the *Ihyā'*, specifically in the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*,³⁴ which serves as the threshold for his exposition of the inner vices and virtues, we find a much more detailed description of the heart. Here we find some of the most explicitly esoteric material to be found within the entire *Ihyā'*, and al-Ghazālī himself bears witness to this. For example, as he concludes his “Exposition of the Soldiers of the Heart” early in the book, he writes,

These, then, are the divisions of the heart's soldiers. To comment [upon] that so that the understanding[s] of the weak-minded (*al-du'afā'*) would be able to grasp it would take long, while the purpose of the likes of this book is that the strong-minded (*al-aqwiyā'*) and the luminaries among the religious intelligentsia (*al-fuḥūl min al-'ulamā'*) would

³⁴ *Ihyā'*, vol. III, 111–169.

derive benefit by means of it. However, we will strive to make the weak-minded understand by [proceeding with] the striking of semblances in order that this may bring them closer to their own understandings.³⁵

Thus, regarding the esoteric nature and intended audience of his *sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, al-Ghazālī himself makes the case for us. Although he admittedly makes an effort to render the text accessible to several levels of engagement, the intended audience is by no means popular.

As we saw above, al-Ghazālī strikes an intimate connection between the heart and the intellect in the *Book of Knowledge*. Among the esoteric points readily found in the *sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* is an explicit corroboration of that intimate connection. In fact, here he takes it a step further by striking a clear and absolute equivalence between the two. Immediately following the initial magnification and invocation of the book, he picks up right where he left off in the *Book of Knowledge*:

The human being's nobility and virtue, by which he completely surpasses the [various] classes of creation, is [won] through his preparation for the gnosis of God, be He praised, [that mystical knowledge] which is, in this world, his beauty and perfection and pride, and is, in [relation to] the Hereafter, his preparedness (*'uddatuhu*) and provision (*dhukhratuhu*). Indeed, he prepares [himself] for the gnosis [of God] through his heart and not through any one of his [bodily] extremities. For the heart is that which perceives³⁶ God, that which draws nigh unto God, that which works for [the sake of] God, that which rushes toward God, and that which unveils what is in God's proximity and possession (*mā 'inda Allāh wa ladayhi*). The [bodily] extremities, on the other hand, follow [the heart] and serve [it]. [They are] the tools which are used by the heart, [which makes use of them] in the way the king makes use of the slave, the way the shepherd utilizes the flock and the artisan the tool. For the heart is that which is accepted in the presence of God if it is delivered from [all] else besides God; and it is veiled from God whenever it becomes immersed in anything other than God. It is that of which [an account is] demanded, the one addressed [by God or perhaps by Munkar and Nakīr], and the one who is reproached. It is that which has the good fortune of sharing in the [blessed station of] proximity to God, for he [the individual] prospers when he purifies³⁷ it, and he fails and becomes wretched

³⁵ Ibid., 117. His Qur'anic tone here is quite unmasked. See, for example, *al-Nūr* (24): 35; *al-Ankabūt* (29): 43.

³⁶ Literally, "that which is knowing of God" (*al-'ālim bi'llāh*).

³⁷ Although there is no explicit indication of a doubled second radical in this

when he defiles it and corrupts it.³⁸ It [i.e., the heart] is that which, in reality, is in obedience to God, while those acts of worship that flow out through the [bodily] extremities are its lights. And [the heart] is [also] that which is disobedient, rebelling against God, be He exalted, while the vile deeds that flow out through the [bodily] members³⁹ are its effects. Through its darkening and its illumination, the good qualities and their counterparts become manifest on the exterior, since every vessel exudes whatever [liquid] it contains.⁴⁰

It [i.e., the heart] is that which, if the human being comes to know it, he knows himself, and, if he comes to know himself, he has come to know his Lord. And it is that which, if the human being is ignorant of it, he is ignorant of himself, and, if he is ignorant of himself, then he is ignorant of his Lord. And whoever is ignorant of his [own] heart, is even more ignorant about other things, since most of the people are ignorant of their hearts and themselves. They have been obstructed from [knowing] themselves, for surely God places an obstruction between man and his heart, and His [act of] obstructing [man] is that He prevents [man] from witnessing it and [from] overseeing it and [from] the gnosis of its attributes. [And He prevents man from the gnosis of] the manner in which [the heart] is turned between two of the fingers of the Merciful⁴¹ and of how it falls in one moment to the lowest of the low, sinking to the horizon of the devils, and how it rises in another [moment] to the highest of the high, ascending to the realm of the angels, those who are brought nigh [unto God].⁴²

Whoever does not know his [own] heart, so that he might oversee it and guide it, and [yet] observes [the stars] from among the storehouses of the *Malakūt* that gleam upon him and within him⁴³ is one of those about whom God—be He exalted—said, “they forget God, and so he causes them to forget themselves. Those are the iniquitous ones (*al-fāsiqūn*).”⁴⁴ The gnosis of the heart, then, and of the

verb (*zakkāhu*), I nevertheless infer one, as this is in accordance with the Qur’ānic usage (see 91:9 and 24:21) and best suits the sense of this passage. See the following note.

³⁸ This passage is actually a very slight but deft reshaping of *sūra* 91 (*al-Shams*), 9–10, which reads, “Truly he succeeds who purifies it [i.e., his own soul], and he fails who corrupts it.”

³⁹ Literally, “that which flows to the [bodily] members by way of vile deeds . . .”

⁴⁰ The paragraph break is my own insertion.

⁴¹ This is a reference to a well-known tradition, in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “There is no heart but that it is between two fingers of the fingers of the Merciful, the Lord of the Worlds.” See Aḥmad bn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*, 4, 182, and Ibn Māja, Introduction (*muqaddīma*), 13. See also the parallel tradition recorded in al-Tirmidhī, Book of Supplications (*al-da’wāt*), 89.

⁴² This is an embellished paraphrase of *Sūrat al-tīn* (95).

⁴³ Here he clearly indicates the fusion of the psyche and the cosmos, a union that wipes away all inner/outer dualism. In the next chapter, we refer to this as his “psycho-cosmology”.

⁴⁴ *Al-Hashr* (59): 19. Again, al-Ghazālī is only citing part of the *āya*. In full, it

reality of its characteristics (*ḥaqīqat awṣāfihī*) is the [very] fundament of religion, and the basis of the [mystical] path of the wayfarers.⁴⁵

He gradually becomes more explicit in his descriptions of the heart, eventually touching upon its true nature. After explaining the meaning of the physical heart, he writes:

the second meaning [of “heart”] is a divine, spiritual subtlety (*latīfa*) that has a connection [or relation] to this bodily heart. That “subtlety” is the reality of the human being, i.e., [the aspect] of the person that comprehends (*al-mudrik*), [intellectually] perceives (*al-‘ālim*), [experientially] knows (*al-‘ārif*), [the aspect that is] addressed (*mukhāṭab*), punished (*mu‘āqab*), reproached (*mu‘ātab*), and of which [an accounting] is demanded (*muṭālab*). [This subtlety] has a connection with the bodily heart, but the intellects of most people have been bewildered over the meaning of its connection. This is because its connection resembles the connection [between] accidents and bodies, [between] the descriptions [of things] and the things described, or the connection [between] the user of a tool and the tool [itself], or the relation [between] the person residing [in a place] and the place [itself] (*al-makān*). Commenting upon that [relation] is among the [things] of which we are wary, [and this is] for two reasons: the first of which is that it has to do with the sciences of the Unveiling, while our only aim in this work is [to treat] the sciences of Right Practice; and the second is that its verification would necessitate a dissemination of the secret of the spirit (*al-rūḥ*), and that was among the things about which the Emissary of God (May God bless him and grant him salvation) would not speak. Thus it is not [appropriate] for someone other than him to speak of it.

Hence, when we use the expression, “heart”, in this book, we mean by it this [divine, spiritual] subtlety, and we intend to treat its descriptions and states rather than its reality in its essence. [This is because] the knowledge [pertaining to] conduct makes necessary the cognizance of its descriptions and its states but does not necessitate the mentioning of its reality.⁴⁶

While it is becoming increasingly clear that there are matters al-Ghazālī will not openly disclose regarding the nature of the heart, he still gives us a great deal to go on here.

One thing he clarifies is that, although the relationship between the “subtlety” and the material/physical heart is somewhat akin to the relationship of an accident to the body in which it inheres, the

reads, “Do not be like those who forgot God, for God caused them to forget themselves; surely those are the iniquitous ones.”

⁴⁵ *Sharḥ ‘ujā’ib al-qalb*, 112.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

two relations are not the same. Indeed, he intimates that equating the two (as many of his *mutakallimūn* confrères do) is a form of bewilderment. Thus, his *kalāmī* formulations, which sometimes espouse this model for the soul-body relation, are ruled out as real explanations—at least at this level of instruction. How then are they connected? He clearly intends a mode of connection that is different from anything he has previously laid out, but just what that mode is he will not say. He is not yet finished with his treatment of this connection, however, as we will see shortly.

Soon after this passage, al-Ghazālī goes on to resolve one of our lingering questions: the essential relationship between the heart and the intellect. Indeed, he exceeds the scope of our query and resolves for us questions we have not yet asked, questions caused by the equivocal usage of the terms “spirit” (*al-rūḥ*), “soul” (*al-nafs*), “heart” (*al-qalb*), and “intellect” (*al-ʿaql*). Each one of these, he says, has two meanings: one corporeal and the other “subtle”. The spirit, for example, can denote a “subtle body” (*jism laṭīf*) or “subtle vapor” (*bukhār laṭīf*) originating in the corporeal heart and spreading throughout the body so as to radiate life in the way that a lamp radiates light. This is the corporeal spirit (*al-rūḥ al-jismānī*). The second and more exalted definition, he says, is

the subtlety (*al-laṭīfa*) that is the knowing, understanding [faculty] in the human being. It is what we have commented on regarding one of the meanings of the heart, which God—be He exalted—intended by His utterance, “Say: the spirit is of my Lord’s *amr*.” And it is a wondrous, divine thing⁴⁷ (*amr ʿajīb rabbānī*), the grasping of whose reality is beyond the power of most intellects and understandings . . .⁴⁸

As we noted in the very beginning of this study, we see him employing the singular noun, *amr*, here as a “thing” or “matter” rather than as a “command”. We also take note here that this subtlety is qualified as “divine” (*rabbānī*), a significant addition to our slowly unfolding definition of the heart. This “divine” nature will be explored in the following pages. It is also worth noting that he refrains from saying that its understanding is beyond *all* intellects and understandings . . . just most. In other words, this “wondrous, divine thing”

⁴⁷ He will use this suggestive yet safe (and wonderfully elusive) description of the spirit over and over again throughout his psychological discussions; for a few more examples in the *sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb*, see 122, 127.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

is *intellectually* understandable, although he does not say how or by whom in this passage.

As for *al-nafs*, he says that the lower, corporeal meaning intended by this term is “that meaning which brings together (*al-ma'nā al-jāmi'*) the irascible faculty and the concupiscent faculty in the human being,” or “the principle (*al-aṣl*) that brings together the blameworthy attributes of the human being.” This latter definition, he admits, is the common usage of the Sufis (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*). The spiritual or essential meaning, however, is

the subtlety (*al-laṭīfa*) that we have mentioned, which is the human being in reality and is the soul of the person and his essence (*dhātuhu*), but it is described in various ways, according to its varying states (*biḥasbi ikhtilāf ahuwālihi*) . . .⁴⁹

And so it is with the intellect, whose meanings we have already examined. Here, however, he adds something to his former definitions. He says that “intellect” is sometimes used to mean the “knowledge of the true natures of things—being an expression for the attribute of the knowledge whose receptacle is the heart.” This is the mundane meaning that is appropriate here, he says; on its highest level, intellect can denote

that which grasps the sciences, being itself the heart, i.e., that [same] subtlety. Now we know that belonging to every knower is an existence in his soul (*fī nafsihi wujūd*), an existence that is a self-subsisting principle (*aṣl qā'im bi-nafsihi*) in which knowledge resides as an attribute. The attribute is something other than that which is described, and the “intellect” may be used to denote [either] the attribute of the knower or the receptacle (*maḥall*) of the apprehension, by which I mean the knower itself. [This latter definition] is what was intended by his [the Prophet's] statement (may God bless him and grant him salvation): “the first thing God created was the Intellect . . .”⁵⁰ Knowledge is an accident, [and so] it is inconceivable that it could be the first creation; rather, it must be that the receptacle is created prior to it or concomitant with it. Otherwise, speaking to it would be impossible. And it is in the report that God—be He exalted—said to it “approach!” and it drew nigh. Then He said to it, “Be gone!” and it turned away.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ This tradition is cited more fully in the *Kiṭāb al-ʿilm*, 109. See our complete rendering of that text earlier in the chapter.

⁵¹ Ibid., 114–5.

This highest definition of intellect is thus equated with the heart, i.e., with the very essence of the being who is [actually] knowing. To avoid any possible equivocation here, he stresses that this “subtlety” is by no means an accident, the possibility of which he left open in the *Book of Knowledge*. Here, he equates it with “a self-subsisting *principle* in which knowledge resides as an attribute.” This is a highly revealing step that he refuses to take in the other texts we have examined. “Self-subsisting” is also a qualification not mentioned elsewhere; indeed, we have seen him purposefully avoid such a qualification because it belongs to the knowledge of the Unveiling.

But what is it? What exactly does he mean here by “principle” here? What is its nature? Is it material or immaterial? He has revealed much, but still the puzzle is not yet solved, since our evolving understanding of his concept of the heart/intellect/spirit/soul is still troubled by a fundamental, essential ambiguity: on the one hand, he does not explicitly affirm its immateriality; on the other hand, he has not indicated that it is material. Rejecting one of the standard Ash‘arī explanations (namely, that of the soul’s being an accident inhering in the body), he is careful not to replace it with anything too definite: nowhere does he refer to this higher entity—i.e., the non-bodily heart—as a “subtle body” or “vapor”, nor does he use any term giving the slightest hint of corporeality. The terms he does employ—*latīfa* (subtlety) and *asl* (principle)—seem intentionally ambiguous and give no hint of commitment on either side.

One thing is certainly clear at this point: the heart and the intellect—in their most elevated, subtle, essential forms—are absolutely synonymous for al-Ghazālī, and the single secret of their true nature, still a mystery, is contained within the theoretical science of *al-mukāshafa*, the experiential knowledge of the Unveiling. The objects of this mode of knowing are unattainable in this world, however, for they reside in the spiritual realm of the *malakūt*, a “world” that we will explore in the next chapter.

Turning to the mysterious and somewhat bewildering connection between the bodily heart and the “subtlety”, he ventures a bit further into the restricted regions of this knowledge at the very end of this first explication (*bayān*). Following his discussion of the meanings ascribed to the terms “heart”, “spirit” and “soul”, he writes,

If it has been unveiled to you that the meanings of these terms—i.e., the bodily heart, the bodily spirit, the impassioned soul, and the sci-

ences—are real,⁵² then these are four meanings for which the four expressions are used. And [there is] a fifth meaning, which is the subtlety, that [aspect] of the person which knows and grasps [the realities of things]. [All] four expressions come to it in turn. Hence, the meanings are five, while the expressions are four. Each expression is used for two meanings. The variance of these expressions, along with their successive [significations], have bewildered most of the learned, and thus you will see them talking about [their] notions, saying “this is the notion of the intellect, and this is the notion of the spirit, and this is the notion of the heart, and this is the notion of the soul,” while the speculator [really] has no comprehension of the meanings of these terms. In order to remove the covering from that, we have presented [in this book] a commentary⁵³ on these terms, since the expression, “heart”, has been mentioned in the Qur’ān and the *sunna*. That which is intended by it [in the sources] is the meaning from among [the various meanings of] “human being” that comprehends and comes to know the reality of things, and it has been metonymically expressed by the heart that is in the breast. [This is] because there is a special relation (*‘alāqa*) between that subtlety and the body of the heart. Even if it is connected to the rest of the body and is of use to it, still it is connected to it through the mediation of the [bodily] heart, for its first connection is with the heart. [It is] as if [the bodily heart] were its receptacle (*maḥall*) and its domain (*mamlaka*), its world and its riding mount. For that [reason], Sahl al-Tustarī likened the heart to the Throne (*al-‘arsh*), and the breast to the Footstool (*al-kursī*) . . . It is not [to be] believed that he regarded [the heart and the breast] as the [actual] Throne and Footstool of God, for that is impossible. Rather, he meant by it that [the bodily heart] is its [i.e., the subtlety’s] domain. And the first way [of comparing them] is due to [the subtlety’s] management and administration [of the body through the heart]. For the two of them [i.e., the heart and the breast] are in relation to it [i.e., the subtlety] as the Throne and the Footstool are in relation to God, be He exalted. This comparison is also only correct from some perspectives (*ba‘d al-wujūh*), but commenting upon that [further] is also inappropriate for our purpose, and so let us pass over it.⁵⁴

In order for us to exploit more fully the meaning of this passage, we would have to know precisely which “perspectives” he has in mind. Also, we would need to identify what exactly constitutes the relation between God and the Throne and the Footstool in his

⁵² Literally, “are present” (*maḥjūda*).

⁵³ Literally, “the commentary . . .”

⁵⁴ *Sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, 115.

esoteric cosmology. These are very challenging, if not impossible, tasks, but we have no alternative but to try.

One of the first places where we can learn something of this relation is—surprisingly—in the context of one of the *kalām* texts, specifically the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, where al-Ghazālī explains that the Throne and God's "mounting" of it must be taken allegorically if the Divine is to be understood in an appropriate way. The meaning of this, he explains, can only involve

that which does not deny the [Divine] description of Grandeur (*al-kibriyā'*) and that which the characteristics of creation and extinction do not touch . . . [such a text] can only be [understood] by way of subjugating [the real meaning] and appropriating [an apt image], just as the poet said: "a man mounted Iraq without a sword or blood spilled."⁵⁵

This, he tells the reader, is the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the "folk of the Truth", he says, and so we may rely upon it with a degree of confidence, even though the discussion is framed within a very mainstream *kalāmī* context.

Much later in the *Ihyā'*, indeed almost at the very end of the very last volume, he again touches upon the topic of the Throne. This comes in a more esoteric context—the *Book of Contemplation* (*Kitāb al-tafakkur*),⁵⁶ specifically in his "explication of how to contemplate the creation of God, be He exalted", the discussion that marks the final section of the book. Here, he explains how the furthest and most sublime goals can only be attained after one has traversed the nearest and most immediate challenges. He writes:

and the closest thing to you is your soul; then [comes] the earth, which is your dwelling place; then [comes] the air that is sufficient for you [to breathe]; then [come] the plants and the animals and all that is on the face of the earth; then [come] the wonders of the atmosphere, which is between heaven and earth; then [come] the seven heavens and their spheres; then [comes] the Footstool; then [comes] the Throne; then the angels who are themselves the bearers of the Throne and the Reservoir (*khazzān*) of the heavens; then, from [the Throne] you go further to [the point of] looking upon the Lord of the Throne and the Footstool and the heavens and the earth and all that is between the two. Between you and these [existents] are the enormous deserts,

⁵⁵ *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, 141.

⁵⁶ *Ihyā'*, vol. VI, 43–72.

the vast distances and the towering mountain passes. And you, after [all this], have not rid [yourself] of the [most] proximate, sloping mountain road, which is the gnosis of the external aspect of yourself. Then you begin to loosen your tongue with your impudence, claiming [that you have won] the gnosis of your Lord and saying that you have come to know Him and His creation. And [then you ask] so what should I contemplate? And whence should I turn my gaze?⁵⁷

What follows is an eloquent guide to the contemplation of the universe, but the larger discussion goes wide of our mark just now. For our present purposes, which have to do only with the nature of the Throne and the relation between it and God, we focus on a single aspect of the passage cited above. Al-Ghazālī depicts the Throne as the closest created existent to God. While shedding no new light on the true nature of the Throne itself, the passage serves to corroborate what we have already seen from the *Qawā'id* regarding the need for allegorical interpretation in the case of the Throne and the other divine features of his spiritual cosmology.

The Throne, it seems, is the most sublime existent in the highest created realm, just as the bodily heart is the most exalted organ within the human body. The Throne manifests God's power through being "mounted"—i.e., through God's subjugation of it and through His management of it and absolute mastery over it. So too the human heart, we might venture, manifests the attributes of power and mastery that originate in the "subtlety", which exercises its power and mastery over the bodily heart. Such "mastery" apparently entails ruling the rest of the body through the mediation of the bodily heart, just as God rules the created universe through the mediation of the Throne, the Footstool, and through the angels who uphold and serve them.

Such a speculative comparison between the two relations (namely, God and the Throne, on the one hand, and the "subtlety" and the bodily heart, on the other) seems to concur with what we have gleaned from the *sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*. The question of the precise nature of the relation or connection itself still remains something of an enigma, however. Does this analogy imply that the "subtlety" is totally separate from the bodily heart, just as God is from the whole of creation? Does it imply that the bodily heart is just a tool through which the subtlety acts while it is occupied with the material domain?

⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

Al-Ghazālī's comparison gives rise to many questions but few answers, once again, and some of these questions will have to wait until we investigate his psycho-cosmology in chapter five. For the "subtlety" that is the spiritual heart properly belongs in the realm of the *malakūt*, he says, whereas the bodily heart belongs to this world of *mulk*, and so the relation between the spirit and the body ought to match the relation between the realm of *al-malakūt* and the world of *al-mulk*.⁵⁸ Thus, a full understanding of his psychology can only be won through unlocking the mysteries of his cosmology.

Before we leave the *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* in this chapter, however, it may prove useful to summarize some of the parallels and contrasts that are emerging between al-Ghazālī's psychological discussions and those of Ibn Sīnā, for nowhere do we find the parallels more pronounced than here in this *Commentary*. Indeed, in places al-Ghazālī reads as an Avicennean, but without the complete array of Ibn Sīnā's technical terms.⁵⁹ One parallel that we have already noted occurs in the course of his description of intellectual prophetic cognition. Another extremely clear, although somewhat less profound, parallel comes here in the course of his explanation of animal psychology. Here, Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the estimative faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmīya*) is clearly appropriated and reformulated in al-Ghazālī's own terms, namely, in the idiom of the heart. For example, in the very beginning of his "Explication of the Special Characteristic (*khāṣṣīya*) of the Human Being," he writes:

Know that God has blessed all of the animals (in addition to the human being) with the entirety of what we have mentioned [in the section on the "Soldiers of the Heart"], since the animal[s] have concupiscence, irascibility, the external senses, and the internal [senses] as well, such that, if a ewe sees a wolf with its eye, it knows [the wolf's] enmity through [the faculties of] its heart. Hence, it flees from [the wolf]. That is the inner apprehension (*al-idrāk al-bāṭin*). Let us then mention that [feature] by which the human heart is set apart . . .⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Among other places, this is quite explicitly stated in his *al-Arbāʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, where he speaks of a third, intermediary "world" that joins the two. Much more will be said of this in chapter five. See Lazarus-Yafeh, 514–15; also Kojiro Nakamura's "Imam Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of Jabarūt" in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 80 (1994), 29–46.

⁵⁹ This may remind us of Professor Nakamura's remark near the end of the second chapter, where he suggests that al-Ghazālī "is inclined privately or unofficially to the philosophical view of the soul (though not in philosophical terms) . . ." See *supra*.

⁶⁰ *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, 119.

The discussion continues, of course, to explain the unique features of human knowledge and human will, which together form the distinguishing characteristics of the human heart vis-à-vis the animal heart. While the ensuing discussion is worthy of attention, what is most interesting for us to note here is the fact that both the substance and even the language of this quotation are taken from Ibn Sīnā's *De Anima*,⁶¹ with a different name and a few slight modifications to make it less technical (and thus less Avicennean). Put simply, al-Ghazālī has essentially co-opted Ibn Sīnā's animal psychology, complete with an animal faculty of estimation (exemplified in the ewe's estimative perception of the wolf's enmity), with slight terminological alterations that make the philosophical psychology more malleable in this context. Any reader, having seen this for what it really is, cannot help but wonder whether he has done something similar in the case of Ibn Sīnā's human psychology. More will be said of this once we have a better grasp of al-Ghazālī's true position on the nature of the spiritual heart or "subtlety" in the next chapter. Although we still do not have sufficient evidence at this point to start hurling accusations of Avicenneanism at al-Ghazālī, we do have more than enough evidence to state that, whatever his esoteric position is on the soul, it bears a certain resemblance to the Avicennean psychology. Certainly we have seen enough to state with confidence that the psychology of the *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* is quite different from the *kalāmī* formulations we found in the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā'id*.

In the Book of *Forbearance and Thanksgiving* (*Kitāb al-ṣabr wa'l-shukr*),⁶² which is the second book in the final quarter (devoted to the saving virtues), al-Ghazālī makes this difference even more evident. Here, in his explication of the "graces of God in [reference to] the creation of the power [of motion] and the moving instruments [of the body]," al-Ghazālī clears up a question about the spirit. This question comes immediately after his description of the corporeal spirit, the nature of which he also treats in the *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*.

If you were to say: you have then described and exemplified the spirit when the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) did not go beyond saying "Say: the spirit is my Lord's affair" when he was asked about the spirit. Thus he did not describe it for them along these lines.⁶³

⁶¹ See *Avicenna's De Anima* (Arabic Text), 166–9.

⁶² *Ihyā'*, vol. IV, 309–410.

⁶³ Literally, "according to this mode" (*'alāh hādihā al-wajh*).

Know then that [all] this is a foolishness that [comes] from the commonly occurring equivocation in [the use of] the expression “spirit”. For “spirit” is used for numerous meanings that would take long to mention. However, of all of them, we described a “subtle body” that is called a “spirit” by the physicians . . .

As for the spirit that is the [self-subsisting] principle, [the spirit] which, if it becomes corrupted, the rest of the body becomes corrupt because of it, that is among the secrets of God, be He exalted. We did not describe it. Nor is there a license [given] for describing it save to say, “it is a Divine matter” (*amr rabbānī*), just as [God], be he exalted, said, “Say: the spirit is my Lord’s affair.” Describing [such] Divine matters (*al-umūr al-rabbānīya*) would be unbearable for [people’s] intellects. Indeed, most people’s intellects are bewildered by them. And, as for the estimations and imaginations [of most people], they are necessarily incapable of [grasping] them [i.e., the Divine matters] in the same way [one’s faculty of] sight is incapable of grasping sounds. The knots of [their] intellects, [which are] confined to the *jawhar* and the accident and [are] imprisoned within the narrow confines [of these categories], waver in mentioning the principles of its description. For nothing of its description can be grasped by the intellect; rather, [only] through another light that is higher and more noble than the intellect [can it be grasped]. And that light dawns in the world of prophecy and sainthood (*‘ālam al-nubūwa wa’l-wilāya*), and its relation to the intellect is like the relation between the intellect and the [faculties of] estimation and imagination.⁶⁴

He seems to dispel here any lingering suspicions we may have had concerning the continuing relevance of his Ash‘arī atomism in these more esoteric contexts. The standard atomic formulations, he says, are tantamount to rational trappings that cannot but fail in their attempts to capture the essence of the spirit. We also cannot miss his casual employment of Ibn Sīnā’s faculty of estimation, here within the context of human psychology.

It must be noted that his use of the term “intellect” in this passage raises another problem of equivocation. He speaks of it here in the context of the *kalāmī* formulations of the soul, and so it evokes the very meaning that he tells us was disparaged by the Sufis due to their confusion over the true meaning of “intellect”.⁶⁵ His usage here, which is disparaging, can hardly be taken to mean the intellect in its most exalted sense, the sense that is nothing other than the “self-subsisting principle” and the very “Divine thing” about

⁶⁴ *Kūtab al-ṣabr wa’l-shukr*, 377.

⁶⁵ See *supra*.

which he is talking in this passage. Were that his intention here, it would have to be equated with the “other light” that “dawns in the World of Prophecy and Sainthood”, for we have already seen al-Ghazālī equate the intellect—in its most sublime sense—with the Qur’ānic references to light, such as *sūrat al-Nūr* (24): 35.

All this having been said, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Ash‘arī or *kalāmī* atomic formulation falls short of the mark in the context of his esoteric psychology. In spite of this growing clarity, we must admit that he does, in several seemingly esoteric places, use language that is highly evocative of the *kalāmī* formulations, such as his reference to the heart as a “part from among the *jawāhir* of the human being” in *Kitāb al-‘ilm*. We will see similar language again as we continue our investigation through to the very end of the *Ihyā’*. His precise intention in using such *kalām*-like language is not clear, but the passage cited above makes it quite explicit that his esoteric position on the soul shares little if anything with his *kalām*.

Still seeking answers, then, we turn to the final book of the *Ihyā’*, *Kitāb dhīkr al-mawt wa mā ba’dahu*,⁶⁶ where al-Ghazālī treats the soul’s experience of death, the separation of the spirit/soul/intellect/heart from the body, and the phenomena of the next world.⁶⁷ His tone here seems slightly less esoteric and more closely aligned with the literal eschatological teachings defended in his *kalāmī* works, but, upon closer investigation, the text reveals many subtleties.

One such example comes in chapter seven,⁶⁸ where he objects to three main views concerning the afterlife: (i) that of the unbelievers (*al-mulhidūn*) and “everyone who does not believe in God or the last day”, who hold that death means extinction pure and simple, an end after which there is no resurrection or reckoning or anything;⁶⁹ (ii) the view of those who believe that the individual “becomes utterly extinct upon dying,” experiences neither reward nor punishment “for as long as he is in the grave, until he is restored [to the body] at the time of the Gathering”;⁷⁰ and (iii) the view of those who hold

⁶⁶ *Ihyā’*, vol. VI, 73–202.

⁶⁷ In the context of this chapter, we will exploit these discussions for their psychological relevance, saving a more focused treatment of their eschatological content for the sixth and final chapter.

⁶⁸ Specifically pp. 130–1.

⁶⁹ T.J. Winter takes this to be a reference to the Dahrīya, the Maṣūriya, the Mu‘ammariya, and the Khaṭṭābiya sects, as well as the pre-Islamic Arabs. See his note “A” on p. 121.

⁷⁰ This is, of course, one of the *kalāmī* doctrines mentioned in the *Iqtisād*, specifically

“that the spirit remains and does not fall into nonexistence with death; rather [they believe] the rewards and punishments are [for] the spirits without the bodies, which are neither resurrected nor gathered in any way.”⁷¹

As we will see more clearly below, he does not object here to the belief in the immaterial soul *per se*, nor to its complete separability from the body, as he does earlier in the *Iqtīṣād*, where he tells his reader that such a doctrine was only granted in the *Tahāfut* for the sake of argument; rather, in this passage he objects only to the coupling of a belief in the immaterial soul with a flat denial of an eventual return to an embodied state for judgement and eternity, which must include (but is in no way restricted to) bodily pleasures and/or torments. In the paragraph that immediately follows, he affirms that

all of these are false beliefs (*zunūn fāsida*), slanting away from the truth. However, that which is witnessed by the [various] avenues of expression and pronounced by the [Qur’ānic] *āyāt* and the [Prophetic] reports is that the meaning of death is just a change of state (*hāl*) and that the spirit remains after taking leave of the body [at death], either [to be] tormented or blessed. The meaning of [the spirit’s] taking leave of the body is the severing of its administration (*inqiṭā’ taṣarrufihā*) from the body, [this occurring] by way of the body’s forsaking [its role of] being obedient to it. For the [bodily] members are tools for the spirit to use, so that it may strike [a blow] with the hand, hear with the ear, see with the eye, and know the reality of things with the heart.⁷² “Heart” here is an expression for the “spirit”, which comes to know things on its own without [using] any tool. For that [reason], it is pos-

that formulation which equates the soul with an accident. Winter includes some of the Mu‘tazilī theologians, together with the Jahmī and Khārījī sects in this group. See his note “B” on p. 121.

⁷¹ *Dhikr al-mawt*, 130–1. This is, of course, the philosophical doctrine he summarizes and refutes in the *Tahāfut* and condemns in other places. Curiously, it is also the very doctrine attributed to the Sufis in the *Mizān al-‘amal*, to which Ibn Ṭufayl referred in the first chapter and to which we will return later in the study. Although not completely accurate in his reading of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, Winter includes some useful comments on p. 122 of his translation.

⁷² While this is obviously not a direct allusion to the philosophical psychology earlier refuted, his language here shows some degree of affinity with the earlier, more philosophical descriptions of the soul’s relationship to the body. Specifically, the reader is reminded of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī’s explanation of the intellect’s gradual liberation from the need to employ the “corporeal instruments” of the body. See his “Letter Regarding the Intellect” (*Risāla fī ‘l-‘aql*) in *Philosophy of the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Hyman and J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973), esp. p. 220, where he discusses the true meaning of Afterlife and the final perfection/felicity of the human being.

sible that it suffers on its own from various kinds of sadness, misery, and sorrow; [alternatively,] it can experience pleasure from the various kinds of joy and happiness. And all of that has nothing to do⁷³ with its [bodily] members. Hence, everything that is a description for the spirit in itself remains with it after it has taken leave of the body, while everything that belongs to [the spirit] on account of the mediation of the [bodily] members becomes idle with the death of the body until the spirit is restored to the body. And it is not unlikely that the spirit is restored to the body in the grave; nor is it unlikely that it is held off until the Day of Resurrection. God knows best about that which He has ruled for each one of His servants.⁷⁴

Separability is no longer a problem, obviously, but questions still remain: namely, although we know that the spirit and the heart and the intellect and the soul are one, we still do not know exactly what it is. What is its nature? Is it some kind of subtle or ethereal material substance or is it totally immaterial and immortal, subsisting entirely on its own? Also, what exactly are the emotional or intellectual pleasures and pains that the heart can experience in total separation from the body and its members? Are they the same kind of next-worldly “pleasures superior to the sensible” whose reality he concedes in the *Tahāfut*?⁷⁵ And if the spirit can experience these more poignant rewards and punishments without the mediation of corporeal “tools”, then why the necessity of upholding an embodied after-life? The answers to these and other questions remain locked within the secret of the spirit, which is the key to the true reality of the heart, and so we have no choice but to keep searching for clues.

Al-Ghazālī continues to explain here that by “heart” he means “spirit” and that by “spirit” he means “that meaning (*ma'nā*) of ‘human being’ that apprehends the sciences and [feels] the pangs of grief, and the delights of joys.” This, he says, is the real nature of the human being, that which “does not die” and “does not pass away”. Furthermore, he says again that by “death” here he means “the severance of [the spirit’s] administration of the body and the body’s departure from [its status] of being [the spirit’s] tool”. He then affirms that “the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the human being is his soul (*nafsuhu*) and spirit (*rūḥuhu*), and it remains [after death] . . .”⁷⁶

⁷³ Literally, “is not connected with . . .”

⁷⁴ *Dhikr al-mawt*, 131.

⁷⁵ See Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 54. More will be said of this below.

⁷⁶ *Dhikr al-mawt*, 131.

This explanation, he admits, is hardly exhaustive, nor does he intend it to be, for he goes on to say a few paragraphs below that

It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through grasping the quiddity of its essence. It was not permitted for [even] the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than “the spirit is my Lord’s affair.”⁷⁷ Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death . . .⁷⁸

As we are coming to expect, he leaves us with questions, unanswered and seemingly unanswerable. He also leaves us tantalized, for not by chance does he throw out the enigmatic, “even if one were to come to know [the secret of the spirit] . . .” He intimates that the secret is both knowable and known even as he raises the veil of pious restraint, effectively telling his reader that he cannot reveal anything more, at least not in this context.

Moving forward to the end of the seventh chapter, we find another important clue in the context of his discussion of Munkar, Nakīr, and their dual interrogation of the soul in the grave. Following his full citation of a lengthy tradition related by Abū Hurayra, al-Ghazālī expounds upon the state of the dead person in the grave:

This is a text that clarifies [the fact] that the intellect does not change because of death. The body, however, and the limbs change. Thus the dead person is [still] thinking, understanding, conscious of the torments and the pleasures, whichever it may be. Nothing of his intellect changes. The intellect that is grasping [these things] is not [part of] these limbs; on the contrary, it is something [hidden] within, without length or breadth; indeed, that which does not subdivide in itself is that which grasps the things. [Even] if all the limbs of the human being were to be dispersed and the only [thing] remaining were the “part” (*al-juzʿ*) that does not break up into parts nor divide, the thinking person in his entirety would still be extant, abiding. And it is just so after death, for death does not undo that part, nor does nonexistence overtake it.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Qurʾān: *al-Isrāʾ* (17): 85. Variant readings are noted *supra*, n. 62.

⁷⁸ *Dhikr al-mawt*, 132.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

While still referring to it as a “part”—just as he did early on in the *Book of Knowledge*—he grants that it has no length or breadth. In short, it is dimensionless, utterly non-spatial, even though it seems to be localized somehow in the body. Is it then material or immaterial? He does not explicitly say, and, based on the evidence he has given us, we cannot conclude anything for certain in this regard. His terminology, however, is highly evocative: “part”—a term synonymous with *jawhar* for the Ash‘arīs and the Mu‘tazilīs—certainly smacks of the *kalām*,⁸⁰ even though his context here is not explicitly dogmatic or theological. It gives us cause to wonder whether he is embracing the genre of *al-kalām* as a truth discourse after all, in spite of the fact that he refrains from using the hallmark term “*jawhar*” in this context. This suspicion is made even more weighty by the fact that he couches the term here in traditional *kalāmī* phraseology: “the part that does not break into parts nor divide” is a standard formula used in defining the atom. Even its status as being “without length or breadth” is consistent with the traditional Ash‘arī understanding (dating back to al-Jubbā‘ī, al-Ash‘arī’s Mu‘tazilī teacher), insofar as the individual atom, as a discrete “minimal part”, has no dimension.⁸¹ Still, al-Ash‘arī himself seems to have left no room in his definition for the isolated existence of a single atom in total separation from all other atoms⁸² as al-Ghazālī seems to affirm in the case of the “part” described above.

Might this “part” then be a single, separated material atom that is theoretically spatial and yet without dimension? Such an explanation would constitute a somewhat unique psychological application of a commonly held Ash‘arī position. Alternatively, the heart might be explained as an immaterial atom, thus taking after the Mu‘tazilī Mu‘ammar (d. 835), whom we mentioned briefly in the second chapter (p. 69). Is al-Ghazālī being sloppy and mixing genres here? His continual references to the “heart” as the receptacle (*mahall*) of knowledge⁸³ evoke *kalāmī* definitions of the atom as the

⁸⁰ See Dhanani’s section on “the equivalence of *jawhar* (substance) and *juz’* (atom)”, 55–62, esp. p. 58 (n. 12), where he cites from al-Juwaynī’s *al-Shāmīl*.

⁸¹ Ibid., 134.

⁸² See Kojiro Nakamura, “Was Ghazālī an Ash‘arite?”, 18–19. This is one of the key reasons Nakamura cites for rejecting an atomic explanation of al-Ghazālī’s psychology. He does not seem to have factored in the possibility, as Frank does, that al-Ghazālī may have simply modified the atomic model of al-Ash‘arī.

⁸³ This is a frequent occurrence even in the most esoteric of books, such as the *Kūtāb sharḥ ‘ajā‘ib al-qalb* (see, for example, p. 125).

receptacle of accidents, but it seems forced and rather out of context to impose a *kalāmī* reading onto a non-dogmatic text, especially one that simultaneously employs psychological terminology that we have come to associate with his mystical texts.

The passage cited several pages above from the *Kitāb al-ṣabr wa'l-shukr* seems to rule out any atomic theological formulation as a real answer. However, al-Ghazālī does, in other places, use atomic language when referring to this “subtlety” in contexts that are expressly non-dogmatic. In whatever way we wish to handle these complex tangles of terminology, we cannot discount the anomalies without a great deal of explaining. Continuing along this line of *kalāmī* speculation, then, the heart might be considered some kind of “subtle body” (*jism laṭīf*), such as that postulated by the Mu‘tazilī al-Nazzām (d. 845), who conceived of the soul as a subtle body diffused equally throughout the physical body;⁸⁴ al-Ghazālī, however, identifies this in his *Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart* as one of the common understandings of the corporeal “spirit” that originates in the corporeal heart and spreads throughout the body.⁸⁵ Hence it cannot be equated with the “spiritual, divine” heart which is never described in such corporeal terms, no matter how subtle.

All we really know about al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the heart, then, is (i) that he calls it a “subtlety”, a “principle” and a “part”; (ii) that he describes it as being rational, divine, spiritual, self-subsisting, dimensionless, and indivisible; and (iii) that it remains quite conscious after the death and corruption of the body, although it seems to remain localized within the body throughout life (with the possible exception of sleep) and immediately after death. But what is its nature? Still we cannot say.

While we can, with certainty, rule out some of the possibilities, the true nature of the heart remains veiled to us. Some of the missing pieces of the puzzle might come together, and quickly, were we to examine less reliable texts, such as the disputed “Epistle of Presence” (*al-Risāla al-ladunīya*), where the human soul and spirit are treated in considerable detail and with astonishing philosophical candor. However, as the authenticity of this work is dubious at best, we cannot rely

⁸⁴ See M.E. Marmura, “Soul: Islamic Concepts” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. Vol. XIII (NY: Columbia University Press, 1987), 462.

⁸⁵ See *Sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, 113, paraphrased *supra*. See also *Kitāb al-ṣabr wa'l-shukr*, 377.

upon it as hard evidence.⁸⁶ For better or worse, we opt to remain within the security of the *Ihyā'*, with occasional support and corroboration offered by other reliable texts within al-Ghazālī's known corpus. We are thus faced with what seems to be an impasse, a dead end, with few avenues left open to us.

While not answering all of our questions, this chapter has brought us much closer to unveiling the mysterious nature of the heart in the thought of al-Ghazālī, but it does not bring us to the end of our search. For that, our one and only remaining chance is to venture into the *malakūt*, the "World of the Unseen", which is the home of the heart and the theatre in which the Unveiling is witnessed. If we are able to come to some clear understanding of the nature of this aspect of al-Ghazālī's cosmology, it may well shed some light on the true nature of the heart, which belongs to this realm and ultimately returns to it in the Hereafter. It is finally to the world of the Unseen, then, that we go for answers.

⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in light of its extreme relevance to our investigation, we have included a large portion of this work (translation and commentary) as an appendix to this study. There, we also take up the question of its authenticity.

CHAPTER FIVE

THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS: THE HEART REFLECTED IN AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S MYSTICAL COSMOLOGY

As we have seen repeatedly in the previous chapters, al-Ghazālī locates the secret of the heart's true nature in the unseen world of the *malakūt* rather than in this world of "[material] Dominion and [sense] Perception" (*al-mulk wa'l-shahāda*),¹ to which the physical heart belongs and where the spiritual heart is a stranger.² His psychology is thus inextricably woven into the fabric of his cosmology. While this explicit connection between al-Ghazālī's psychology and cosmology has been noted many times before,³ the full import of what we may call his psycho-cosmolgy remains unexcavated. For only when we have understood the true nature of the *malakūt* and its relation to the world of *mulk* can we attempt to solve in a definitive way the puzzles of the spiritual heart and its relation to the body in the writings of al-Ghazālī. This chapter, then, tries to answer the following questions: what exactly is the "world" of the *malakūt*? What is the heart's relation to it? What is the relation between the "worlds" of *al-malakūt* and *al-mulk*? What can the relation between these two cosmological worlds teach us about the spiritual heart's relation to the body?

In order to gain a balanced and well-rounded sense of his cosmological discussions of the "worlds" and the relation(s) between them, we will sample several poignant passages, both within and beyond the *Ihyā'*, beginning with a very detailed passage from the *Mishkāt*.

¹ Examples abound, both within and without the *Ihyā'*. For additional references see his introduction to *Kūtāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, where he mentions "... its marvels and inner secrets [which] are entirely within the world of *al-malakūt*..." (113); see also *Alchemy*, 6–7; *Jawāhir*, 11; and *al-Arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Cairo: 1328), 104.

² This is one of the crucial realizations in the process of self-knowledge for al-Ghazālī. See his *Kūtāb dhamm al-ghurūr*, 192, 228.

³ See Wensinck's chapter on "Cosmologie et Mystique" in *La Pensée de Ghazzālī* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1940), 79–101; also Lazarus-Yafeh's very insightful but far too brief appendix "On al-Ghazzālī's Cosmology" in *Studies*, 503–522; also Kojiro Nakamura's "Imam Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered..."

Know that “the universe” (*al-‘ālam*) is [actually] two worlds: a spiritual and a bodily, [or], if you like, a sensible and an intellectual, [or], if you like, a lofty and a base. All [of these pairings] are similar, but they differ in the manner of expressions. If you give expression to the two [worlds] in reference to themselves,⁴ then you would say “bodily” and “spiritual” [respectively]. In addition, if you expressed them in terms of the eye that perceives each one, you would say “sensible” and “rational” [respectively]. If you expressed them in a way that [compared] one to the other, you would say “lofty” and “base” [respectively]. Perhaps you would call one of them the “world of Dominion and [sense] Perception” and the other the “world of the Unseen and Sovereignty (*al-malakūt*)”. Whoever looks at the realities through [linguistic] expressions may perhaps suffer confusion in the face of the multitude of expressions, [thereby] imagining a multitude of meanings. For the one to whom the realities have been revealed, [however], he makes the meanings primary and to the expressions secondary. The case of the weak-[minded] is just the opposite, since he seeks the verities through the expressions.⁵

The *malakūt*, then, is a spiritual plane perceived through rational “vision”, contrasted with *al-mulk*, which is bodily and perceived through the physical senses. A little further on, al-Ghazālī explains that the “sensible” plane serves as a kind of stairway to the rational, “for, were there no connection and no correspondence between the two, we would not be able to traverse the way of [gradual] ascendance to [the rational plane]. And if that [bridging of the gap] were not feasible, then the journey unto the Divine Presence and to [a state of] proximity to God—be He exalted—would be impossible.”⁶

Still further on he writes,

The Divine Mercy fashioned the world of [sensual] Perception as a parallel⁷ [world] to the world of the *malakūt*. For there is nothing in this world that is not a metaphor (*mithāl*) for something in that world. It may be that one thing [in this world] is a metaphor for [several] things in the world of the *malakūt*, and it may be that a single thing in the *malakūt* has numerous metaphorical semblences in the world of [sensual] Perception. However, [a thing] would only be a semblence if it corresponded [to the other] in one of the ways of resemblance and correlated [to it] in one of the ways of correlation . . .⁸

⁴ That is, plainly, directly.

⁵ Although the translation is our own, the Arabic passage is borrowed from Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, 507.

⁶ Ibid. This is even more fully treated in the *Jawāhir*, 28–9. See below.

⁷ More literally, an “equivalent” or “counterbalanced [world]” (*muwāzana*).

⁸ Arabic text taken from Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, 508.

In the *Jawāhir*, he corroborates this with an almost identical passage:

There is nothing in the world of *al-mulk wa'l-shahāda* that is not a symbol (*mithāl*) for something spiritual in the world of *al-malakūt*, just as if it [the spiritual referent] were [the thing's] spirit and meaning. The [external] form and mold are not the thing itself, [for] the bodily symbol from the world of [sense] perception is an embodiment of the spiritual meaning from that [other] world. For that reason, the world (*al-dunyā*) is [but] one stopping place among the stopping places on the way to God. [It is] necessarily so in [the light of] the reality of the human being, since, just as arriving at the inner core is only possible by way of the outer husk, so too ascending to the world of spirits is only possible by way of the symbols of world of bodies. You will only know this parallel by way of metaphor. Look at what is revealed to the sleeper by way of the true vision, which is one forty-sixth a part of prophecy. [See] how it is revealed by imaginative symbols, for whosoever comes to know [Divine] wisdom, apart from its own folk, [that is,] sees it in sleep.⁹

Hence, every single thing in the world of generation and corruption bears some kind of relation or likeness to something in the *malakūt*, and this is by way of metaphor, semblance, or signification, rather than by way of a direct, one-to-one correspondence. The material plane is thus a kind of material image modeled after the spiritual plane, wherein the real substantive “things” reside. The relation between the two is thus tantamount to the relation between a word and the meaning to which it points, a signifier and the thing signified. Is it thus with the physical heart and the “subtlety” to which it corresponds? We will attempt to resolve this question in the course of this chapter.

As Lazarus-Yefeh rightly notes, this parallelism or correspondence between the worlds applies to everything within the realm of *al-mulk*, including sacred texts, such as the Arabic Qur'ān, which, as a linguistic (and thus metaphorical) “book”, must correspond in a significative or allegorical way to the corresponding intelligible verity (or verities) within the realm of the *malakūt*. Again, she rightly recognizes that this does not mean that the literal meanings of the Qur'ān can be disregarded as mere metaphors or symbolic utterances which, of themselves, have no power or authority; on the contrary, al-Ghazālī is extremely consistent in his insistence upon the

⁹ *Jawāhir*, 28–9.

integrity of both the internal and the external dimensions of the text; hence, the literal meanings cannot be compromised for the sake of the inner, esoteric meanings, just as one's everyday performance of the obligatory duties of Islam cannot be neglected in the name of an inner life that no longer "needs" the external forms of worship.¹⁰ Indeed, in places, his treatment of the external forms of worship is imbued with an almost occult sense of mystery and awe connected to each posture and every act passed down from the *Sunna* of the Prophet.¹¹ This is a crucial aspect of his thought that deserves more attention than we can give it here.

Returning to the question of his cosmology, as we have already seen in the *Mishkāt* and as can be seen in the majority of al-Ghazālī's non-*kalāmī* cosmological discussions, the created universe generally divides into two worlds: *al-mulk* and *al-malakūt*, the former standing for the created material universe (including the heavens) and the latter expression representing the invisible world of "spirit" and intelligible meaning, a world that finds metaphorical and allegorical representation in the world of Sensual Perception. Sometimes, however, he adds a third world that bridges the two, and this is the world of *al-jabarūt*, the world of [Divine] "Almightiness",¹² which seems to overlap slightly the corresponding shores of both worlds, thus bridging and binding together the otherwise irreconcilable worlds

¹⁰ Lazarus-Yafeh writes, "The content of the Qur'ān is of the higher *'ālam al-malakūt*, but it was presented to man by the prophets in parables, images and language belonging to this terrestrial world . . . The Qur'ān resembles a dream in this respect, and the exploration of the Qur'ān's true meaning (*ta'wīl*) resembles the deciphering of a dream and the uncovering of its true meaning (*ta'bīr*). Al-Ghazzālī, however, makes great efforts to stress the fact that, in spite of this, one should never ignore (as does the Bāṭiniyya) the simple outward meaning of the Qur'ān (*zāhir*) while trying to understand its internal meaning (*bāṭin*), as one must always consider each as complementing the other as a guide towards a correct comprehension of the Holy Book" (508). The connection she draws between *al-ta'wīl* and *al-ta'bīr* can be witnessed in many places, such as in the *Jawāhir*, 30–31.

¹¹ See Watt's translation of the *Munqidh* in *Faith and Practice*, 75, 78–9, and 86–92.

¹² Although Burrell translates this as "power", Lazarus-Yafeh as the "world of divine powers", and Nakamura simply leaves it untranslated, I opt for the somewhat rough "almightiness" in an attempt to convey the all-compelling Divine power or might that is manifested in this realm. As we march ahead in this chapter and witness in the following passage how this world is ultimately equated with the Divine attribute of will for al-Ghazālī, we might even be tempted to think of this plane as the psycho-spiritual "realm" of Divine compulsion (*jabr*), where the seeker realizes that all willing and all action are ultimately engulfed by the inscrutable Divine will. In the words of al-Ghazālī, it is unveiled to the seeker in this "world" that "the agent (*al-fā'il*) is one" (*Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul*, 127).

of spirit and matter.¹³ This three-part scheme can be glimpsed in a few places, one of the most vivid illustrations coming in the second part of the *Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul*, specifically in the section on the true nature of *al-tawhīd*.¹⁴ Here al-Ghazālī explains in considerable detail how the heart's journey traverses the first two "worlds" on its way to the *malakūt*, which is its ultimate destination. Choosing the allegorical format of a parable—the tale of the "Pilgrim and the Pen"—he relays how, in the course of his confusing journey, the wayfarer receives counsel from the human intellect (personified):

You should know that there are many dangers on the path [of enquiry into the reality of agency], so the right thing for you would be to give up [the search] and cease what you are doing. This is not your nest, so leave it; yet everything is easy for those who are fashioned for it. But if you really want to follow the path to its goal, what you will see and hear will be brilliant. You should know that there are three worlds on your path. The earthly world of visible things is the first, containing paper, ink, pens, and hands; and you will easily pass beyond this station. The second world is the intelligible world (*al-malakūt*), and that lies beyond me. If you pass beyond me you will reach its station, and there lie wide deserts, towering mountains, and teeming seas; and I do not know how you will fare there. The third is the world of **Almightiness** (*al-jabarūt*), which lies between the earthly world and the intelligible world. **[When] you have crossed [over] them, [you will have passed through] three stations, the first of which is the station of power, [then] will, and [finally] knowledge.**¹⁵

This world [of the *jabarūt*] is midway between the world of **[material] Dominion and [sensual] Perception and the world**

¹³ For an insightful consideration of this intermediate "world", see Kojiro Nakamura's "Imam Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered . . ." Nakamura identifies al-Ghazālī's *jabarūt* as "the world within a man, consisting of imagination or image (*khayāl*), together with knowledge, will, power and the like . . ." (44). He is thus in agreement with our identification of al-Ghazālī's mystical cosmology as a map of the human psyche as it makes its way through the terrain of the Divine attributes.

¹⁴ *Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul*, 118 and following. The lion's share of the parable below (pp. 124ff.) is borrowed from David Burrell's forthcoming translation of the book (Fons Vitae/Islamic Texts Society). Where my own reading of the text makes significant departures from his rendering, I overlay my own translation. This is indicated by boldface type. The translation may thus be viewed as something of a collaborative effort. I will thus provide the pagination of Burrell's English text along with that of the Arabic text.

¹⁵ This sentence is difficult to decipher. Burrell's rendering leads the reader to regard these three stations as belonging to the world of *al-jabarūt* rather than to all of the worlds. His rendering, however, seems unlikely, for the possessive pronominal suffix is feminine, thus appearing to signify a non-human plural rather than a masculine singular.

of *al-malakūt*, since the world of [material] Dominion is easier to traverse,¹⁶ while the intelligible world is more difficult to traverse. Standing between the earthly and intelligible worlds, the world of Almightyness resembles a ship moving between water and land: it is not as turbulent as being in the water and yet not as secure as being on land. Everyone who walks on the earth walks in the world of Dominion and Sense-Perception (*al-mulk wa 'l-shahāda*), but if one's strength endures to the point of being able to board the ship, then he is as one who is walking in the world of Almightyness. And if one comes to the point of walking on water without a ship then he walks in the intelligible world (*al-malakūt*) without any hesitation. So, if you are incapable of walking on water, leave. For you have gone beyond the land and have left the ship so that all that remains before you is pure water. The first [step into] the world of *malakūt* entails an eyewitnessing of the pen with which knowledge is inscribed upon the tablet of the heart, and [it entails] the attainment of the certitude by which one is able to walk on water. You have [no doubt] heard the statement of God's Apostle—may God grant him peace and salvation—about Jesus—peace be upon him – “if he had attained a higher degree of certitude, he would have walked on air.”¹⁷

We cannot help but notice here the relation between the worlds and the attributes, a relation that approaches complete mutual identification. In effect, the pilgrim's journey through the “worlds” is described here as a journey through the Divine attributes, which the “worlds” represent. The successful voyage through and beyond the material, visible plane is tantamount to the mystic's psycho-spiritual journey through the Divine attribute of power. For al-Ghazālī, this seems to entail his total acceptance of God as the only agent, a realization that acts as the gateway to the third and highest level of *al-tawhīd*, the level of those possessing mystical insight.¹⁸

The Pilgrim's voyage through the world of “Almightyness” (*al-jabarūt*) is in effect his psycho-spiritual journey through the attribute of will. This, closely related to the previous journey, seems to hinge upon the pilgrim's total acceptance of the inscrutability of the Divine will.

¹⁶ Literally, “is easier in terms of [making one's] way.”

¹⁷ Burrell, trans., 19–20; Arabic text, 124–5.

¹⁸ See Burrell, 12. This recognition of God as the only Agent echoes throughout the entire book. See, for example, pp. 132, 134 (Arabic text).

The pilgrim continued on from there to the “**Right Hand**” where he saw it and regarded its marvels, even greater than the knowledge of the **Pen**. He was not able to describe or explain any of them; indeed, many volumes could not even include one hundredth of its description. In sum, however, [one can say that] it is not like other right hands, as the hand is not like other hands, nor the finger like other fingers. As he saw the **Pen** moving in His grip and so realized who was responsible for the **Pen**, he asked the **Right Hand** about its role as the one who sets the **Pen** in motion. He responded: “My answer will be like the one you heard from the **Right Hand** which you saw in the visible world. It is a screen for the power; since the hand has no authority in itself, there can be no doubt that the power moves it.”¹⁹

The pilgrim journeyed on to the **World of Power** (*‘ālam al-qudra*) and saw there wonders which made him disdain those he had seen before, and when he asked regarding the movement of the **Right Hand**, he was told, “I am only an attribute; go ask the **Omnipotent One** (*al-Qādir*), for authority belongs to the **One possessing** the attribute rather than to the attribute itself.” At this point he was about to turn away and forsake any further questioning, when he was held fast by a “firm saying” (14:27) proclaimed from behind the veil of the pavillions of the Divine Presence: “He is not to be questioned as to what He does; it is they who are questioned” (21:23). Dread of the Divine Presence enveloped him and he fell thunderstruck, shaken by the fact of being so overwhelmed.²⁰

The final voyage is through the intelligible world of the *malakūt*. In effect, it is the wayfarer’s journey through the Divine attribute of knowledge, understood here to be far beyond conventional, intellectual understanding. Indeed, here the servant’s pious recognition of his eternal inability to “know” the Divine is the crown of his knowledge.

When he recovered, he said: “Praise be to You! **How great is Your circumstance** (*sha’n*)! **I have turned to You, placed [all] my trust in You, and I have come to believe that You are the King, the [All-]Compelling, the Singular, the Overwhelmer. I fear only You. I hope in You only. I seek refuge only in Your pardon from Your punishment, in your good pleasure from your displeasure. What can I do but beseech You and beg You and supplicate before You? So I say: ‘Open for me my [own] breast** (*sadrī*)’ (20:25) that I may know You, and loosen my

¹⁹ The paragraph break is my insertion; it is in accord with the Arabic text and seems to be in accord with the natural transition here in the narrative.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24; Arabic text, 126.

tongue that I may praise You." Then it was announced to him from behind the veil: "Take care not to aspire to praise greater than the **Master** of the Prophets. Rather turn to him, take what he gives you and renounce what he forbids you, saying what he says to you. For there is nothing more [to be said] at this level than his saying: 'Praise to You! I do not know how to praise You; You are as You praise Yourself.'" To which the pilgrim said: "My God! If the tongue is unable to praise You, how can the heart aspire to know You?" Then it was **called out: Take care in overstepping the necks of the righteous ones.** Rather return to **the greatest of the righteous ones** [Abū Bakr] and emulate him, for the Companions of the **Master** of the Prophets 'are like the stars: follow them and you will be rightly guided.' Have you not heard it said: 'The very inability to attain understanding is itself understanding.' It is **sufficient** for you to share in Our Presence [**enough**] to know that you are excluded from Our Presence, incapable of glancing at Our Beauty and Our Glory."²¹

The parable is included here to shed light on the underlying unity of the worlds and the stations while delineating the ascending psychocosmological degrees experienced by the mystic wayfarer as he/she ascends from the material plane, through the *jabarūt*, and into the intelligible world. As we noted above, this passage suggests that these degrees or "stations" are tantamount to the pilgrim's experiential journey through the Divine attributes, beginning with power, progressing to will, and culminating in knowledge. While it thus clarifies some questions about mystical ascent and the natures of the psychospiritual "worlds" through which the seeker must journey, the structure of the parable still sheds little additional light on our psychological question regarding the precise relation between the physical heart and the spiritual 'subtlety' to which it corresponds, apart from suggesting some kind of possible intermediary that might link the two.

In other places, the possible relevance of this intermediary world to the spirit-body problem is much clearer. In the *Kitāb al-arbaʿin fī uṣūl al-dīn*, which is full of fecund psycho-cosmological content, he explicitly treats the connection between the physical person in the world of Sensual Perception and the spiritual heart in the world of the *malakūt*. This comes in the context of the profound and mysterious *spiritual* effects of physical purification and Qurʾānic recitation, both of which originate with the body on the material plane but nevertheless reverberate through all of the worlds and effect the soul

²¹ D. Burrell, trans., 24; Arabic text, 126.

at every level. In reference to the recitation of the Qur'ān, then, al-Ghazālī writes,

The effect of that [i.e., the recitation] manifests itself in your [bodily] members through [your] weeping out of grief, [your] breaking into a sweat on the brow out of shame, [your] skin shivering [and] getting goosebumps and [your] back muscles quivering out of dread . . . If you have done that, then all of your [bodily] limbs have participated in attaining the [blessed] portion (*hazz*) of the Qur'ān, and the effects of the Qur'ān have emanated over your three worlds, by which I mean the world of the *malakūt*, the world of the *jabarūt*, and the world of [sensual] Perception. Know that you consist of the three worlds, for within you is a part of each world. And know that the pure, unadulterated lights of gnosis emanate from the world of the *malakūt* unto the secret of the heart, for it too is of the *malakūt*. As for the effects [of these lights] by way of dread, fear, happiness, awe and the rest of the states, they descend from the world of *al-jabarūt*, and their resting place is the breast (*al-ṣadr*), just as we alluded to the first [receptor] with the [term] heart. [This is] because the world of the *jabarūt* is between the world of the *malakūt* and the world of [sensual] Perception, just as the breast is between the [spiritual] heart and the [bodily] limbs. As for the weeping and sobbing and shivering with goosebumps and the quivering of muscles, they descend from the world of [sensual] Perception and come to rest upon the [bodily] limbs, for they are [also] of the world of [sensual] perception. But I do not see you understanding anything of the heart but the pine-shaped organ, [nor] anything of the breast other than the bone [that] envelops [the physical heart]. For you only grasp the outermost cover and husk of each thing; how far you are from grasping the verities! Surely even the beasts and the dead are in possession of this [material organ], while nothing of the lights of gnosis and the sciences descend upon it, nor [any of] the effects of [such lights], by way of fear and dread and happiness. If you would like to get a whiff of something of the scents of these secrets (and [by the way] I do not see you [really] wanting [such an experience], for Satan has taken hold of your throat with the cord of lustful desires), then there is something for you in the chapter on *al-tawhīd* from the *Kitāb al-tawhīd [wa'l-tawakkul]*, if you want it.²²

Many salient points are raised here, the first of which is the explicit acknowledgement that the cosmological “worlds” are as much inside the seeker as he/she is within the worlds. Thus, while the lights of mystical gnosis seem to originate from somewhere outside of the

²² Again, although the translation is my own, the Arabic text is borrowed from Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, 515.

individual psyche, they are only and always experienced within the theatre of the spiritual heart, which both belongs to and contains the *malakūt*. All of this seems to constitute the rational plane. Below this is what we may call the emotional plane—the theatre of the “states” (*al-aḥwāl*)—which is equivalent to the “breast”, by which he clearly means something other than the physical cavity wherein resides the physical heart. Below this is the physical, material plane, to which the body, along with its concupiscent desires, belongs. While he does not explicitly say here that the *malakūt*, i.e., the heart, is utterly immaterial, all of the indications seem to be pointing that way. If we want more information, he steers us to the very passage from the *kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul* that we examined above, the passage that imparted the crucial clue that the world of the *malakūt* is in effect the Divine attribute of knowledge.

The explicit link here between the intelligible world of Divine knowledge and the material plane is the level of the states, associated with the breast and with the cosmological category of the *jabarūt*. While clearly distinguished from the baseness of the material world, it is equally distinguished from the intelligible, for it involves change, transformation, and, above all, subjective feeling. While this may not definitively clear up all questions about the intermediate world, it does help us to understand it from an experiential standpoint. In the words of Kojiro Nakamura,

What takes place within a man such as knowledge, judgement, will, power, and various feelings is certainly not visible, and therefore it is not of the world of *mulk*. Nor is it of the world of *malakūt*, since he is conscious of all these and knows they are *his*. But it is extremely difficult for him to know in reality, or to realize, that they are God's, though he may know the truth intellectually. Thus the ship moves between the land and the water, namely, in the world of the *jabarūt*, above which lies the world of *malakūt*. On the other hand, to walk on the water means not only to know that he is a mere puppet of God, but also to *become* a mere puppet by annihilating himself.²³

Turning again to the highest level of his psycho-cosmology, the equivalence al-Ghazālī strikes above between the Divine attribute of knowledge and the *malakūt* helps us to make sense of other statements, such as one very intriguing passage from the *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*,

²³ “Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology . . .”, 43.

specifically following a discussion of the main reasons why the “mirror” of the spiritual heart may fail to fulfill its destiny of becoming a perfect reflection of the verities that reside in the realm of the *malakūt*. He writes,

... every heart is, by [virtue of] its innate nature, equipped and ready²⁴ for the gnosis of the verities because it is a noble, divine thing, separate from the rest of the *jawāhir* of the world²⁵ by virtue of this unique characteristic and nobility... The one [for] whom the veil between himself and God has been lifted [experiences] a manifestation of the image of [the worlds of] *al-mulk* and *al-malakūt* in his heart, and so he sees [the paradise] of the last day, beyond which are the heavens and the earth. As for the whole of [creation], the greatest compass is [that] of “the heavens and the earth”, for “the heavens and the earth” is an expression for the [whole] world of *al-mulk* and [sensual] Perception, which is, on the whole, finite, even though it is expansive from end to end, its flanks far apart from each other. As for the world of the *malakūt*, which [consists of] the secrets invisible to the [physical] eye²⁶ and is [grasped] exclusively by the apprehension of [those endowed with] inner vision, it has no end. Yes, that which becomes in part visible to the heart is [of] a finite scope, but in itself and in relation to the knowledge of God it is infinite. And the whole of the world[s] of *al-mulk* and *al-malakūt*, if a single utterance were to be taken [for everything], would be called “the Divine presence”, for the Divine Presence encompasses all of the existents, since there is nothing in existence save God—be He exalted—and His acts. And His kingdom and [His] servants are from His acts. That which manifests itself of [all of] that to the heart is paradise itself according to a people, and that is the reason [why] the Folk of the Truth insist upon the reality of paradise. And the extent of [a person’s] domain in Paradise is contingent upon the extent of his gnosis, and so—to a certain measure—God and His attributes and acts will be revealed to him. But then the intention [underlying] all of the forms of obeisance and the bodily acts [of worship] is the purification, chastening, and emptying out of the heart. The one who purifies it will find success. And the intention [underlying] its purification is the attainment of the lights of faith within [the heart], by which I mean the dawning of the light of gnosis. That is what [God]—be He exalted—intended by saying, “[as for] the one

²⁴ Here I use two English adjectives to cover the nuance of the single Arabic adjective (*ṣāliḥ*), which would literally come through as “whole” or “fit”.

²⁵ Here we note a typographical error in the text. The ۱ (a) and the immediately following ۱ (l) of *‘ālam* appear to have been mistakenly fused so that the word *‘ilm* (knowledge) appears in the text in place of *‘ālam* (world), which is the only viable possibility in this context.

²⁶ Literally, “invisible to the eyewitnessing of [people’s] faculties of sight”.

whom God wills to guide, He opens his breast to *al-islām*²⁷ and “the one whose breast has been opened by God to *al-islām* is following a light from His Lord.”²⁸

Al-Ghazālī thus explains here that the world of the *malakūt* is infinite and limitless from God’s perspective. The heart’s apprehension of it, however, is limited by its own level of purification, emptiness [of ego and attachment], and capacity. When we recognize that for him this “world” is, in effect, the world of God’s mind—the Divine attribute of knowledge—such a description comes within reach of the understanding.

Having walked through this important feature of al-Ghazālī’s mystical cosmology, we are better able to make sense of many passages, some of which we will examine here for purposes of review and corroboration and others for reasons of continued exploration.

In the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, the somewhat basic *kalām* work to which we have already turned many times in this study, al-Ghazālī equates this world of *al-malakūt* with the Qur'ānic realm of the unseen (*'alam al-ghayb*), which is to this world as the esoteric (*bā'in*) is to the exoteric (*zā'hir*) in matters scriptural and religious. From the *Kitāb al-'ilm*, the *Mishkāt*, *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, *Jawāhir al-qur'ān*, and many other texts, we know that the *malakūt* is a realm into which the physical senses cannot penetrate and would be of no use anyway, for the only mode of perception in that realm is through “the light of inner vision” (*nūr al-baṣīra* and sometimes *al-baṣīra al-bā'ina*),²⁹ a mode of perception explicitly tied to the intellect, in its most sublime sense, and to the “other eye”—the “eye of the [spiritual] heart”, which is itself a kind of “window (*nāfidha*) into the world of the *malakūt*.”³⁰

Al-Ghazālī speaks of this mode of perception mostly in connection to three things, all of which belong to and originate in the realm of the *malakūt*: dream visions, waking visions, and death. This is not surprising, since he explicitly equates the Hereafter (*al-ākhirā*) with the world of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), or the *malakūt*. One clear example comes in the Persian *Kīmyā'*, specifically in the chapter on self knowledge.

²⁷ *Al-An'ām* (6): 125.

²⁸ *Al-Zumar* (39): 22. The entire passage cited above is taken from *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, 127–8.

²⁹ See *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*, 121, 127 (Arabic text).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

His five senses are like five doors opening to the external world; but, more wonderful than this, his heart has a window which opens on the unseen world of spirits. In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened and man receives impressions from the unseen world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future. His heart is then like a mirror which reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate.³¹ But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull this mirror, so that the impression[s] it receives are not clear. After death, however, such thoughts vanish and things are seen in their naked reality, and the saying of the Koran is fulfilled: "We have stripped the veil from off thee and thy sight today is keen."³²

The opening of a window in the heart towards the unseen³³ also takes place in conditions approaching those of prophetic inspiration, when intuitions spring up in the mind unconveyed through any sense channel. The more a man purifies himself from fleshly lusts and concentrates his mind on God, the more conscious will he be of such intuitions. Those who are not conscious of them have no right to deny their reality.

Nor are such intuitions confined only to those of prophetic rank. Just as iron, by sufficient polishing, can be made into a mirror, so any mind by due discipline can be rendered receptive of such impressions . . .³⁴

In his description of these psycho-spiritual phenomena that are experienced by the initiated mystic, al-Ghazālī says in the *Munqidh*,

from the very start of the Way revelations and visions begin, so that, even when awake, the Sufis see the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hear voices coming from them and learn useful things from them. Then their state ascends from the vision of forms and likenesses to stages beyond the narrow range of words . . . speaking in general, the matter comes ultimately to a closeness to God . . .³⁵

Returning to the *Ihyā'*, more specifically to the *Book of Penitence* (*Kitāb al-tawba*), we find more psycho-spiritual content in the subsection on "the Way the [Ascending] Degrees (*al-darajāt*) and [Decending] Levels (*al-darakāt*) in the Hereafter are laid out According to the Good and Evil Deeds of this World". He writes,

³¹ This is Field's somewhat free translation of the Qur'ānic *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*. See E. Daniel's footnotes 7 and 8, p. 9.

³² *Qāf* (50): 22.

³³ Here we see a phrase similar to the one cited above from *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*, 127.

³⁴ *Alchemy*, 9–10.

³⁵ *al-Munqidh*: see McCarthy's translation in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 94–5.

Know that this world is of the realm of Dominion (*al-mulk*) and [sense] Perception (*al-shahāda*) and [that] the Hereafter is of the realm of *al-ghayb* and *al-malakūt*. By "*al-dunyā*" I mean your state prior to death, and by "*al-ākhirā*" I mean your state after death. Your "here" and your "Hereafter" are [thus] your attributes and states . . . now we are speaking from this world (*al-dunyā*) about the Hereafter, for we are speaking now within the *dunyā*, which is the realm of *al-mulk*. Our intention is to comment upon the Hereafter, which is the realm of the *malakūt*, but it is inconceivable to comment upon the world of the *malakūt* in this world except through the striking of semblances (*al-amthāl*). To this effect, [God]—be He exalted—said, "And these semblances we strike for humankind, but only the gnostics (*al-ʿālimūn*) understand them." This is because the realm of *al-mulk* is a dream (*naʿwm*) in relation to the realm of *al-malakūt*. To this effect, [the Prophet]—God grant him peace and salvation—said, "people are sleeping [in this life], and they awaken when they die."

And that which will be in [your] waking life does not become intelligible to you in [your] sleep except through the striking of similitudes, which stand in need of interpretation (*al-taʿbīr*); likewise, that which will be in the waking of the Hereafter only becomes intelligible in [our] sleep through a great many similitudes, by which I mean that which you know of the science of [dream] interpretation.³⁶

Al-Ghazālī proceeds to give three examples of the kind of interpretation he intends, and then he continues:

[Dream] interpretation (*al-taʿbīr*) is [when] someone turns it [the similitude or metaphor] to its ultimate [meaning] (*awwalahu ilā ākhirihi*), similitudes made known to you by way of the striking of semblances. By "semblance" we mean the channelling of the meaning into an image (*sūra*); if one were to look at its meaning, he would find it true, and if one were to look at its image, he would find it false [i.e., indicating other than the true intention] . . .

It is not befitting for the prophets to speak to the people (*al-khalq*) other than through the striking of similitudes, for they are charged to speak to humankind according to the capacities of their [i.e., the people's] intellects, whose capacity is [limited by the fact] that they are asleep. And nothing is revealed to the sleeper except by way of a semblance (*bimithl*). Thus, when they die they wake up and realize that the metaphor was true [in its signification]. To that effect, [the Prophet]—God bless him and grant him salvation—said, "the heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Merciful." It is [an example] of the [kind of] metaphor that only the gnostics understand; as for the ignoramus, the capacity of his intellect will not go beyond the external

³⁶ *Ihyāʾ*, vol. IV, 260ff.

[literal meaning] of the metaphor due to his ignorance in exegesis (*tafsīr*), which is [properly] called *ta'wīl*, just as the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of that which is seen of the similitudes in sleep is called *ta'bīr*. Is God—be He exalted—then attributed with a hand and fingers? Be He exalted above the [figurative] statement with a great exaltation!³⁷

He continues with several more examples, the specifics of which do not concern us here. A bit further on, however, he adds something that is extremely relevant for our investigation. “And, in the same way,” he writes,

it could be that there appears the [same] striking of similitudes regarding the matter of the next world, similitudes by which the unbeliever (*al-mulhīd*) embraces falsehood due to the inflexibility of his gaze upon the metaphor’s external [literal] meaning and its [seeming] contradiction [by the inner, true intention].³⁸

This final suggestion that the verities of the next world might be dramatically different from the literal images in most people’s minds is strengthened by a relevant passage taken from the *Jawāhir*, in the section placed just after his comparison of dream interpretation and Qur’ānic exegesis. Al-Ghazālī writes,

Understand from this that, as long as you are in this life of *al-dunyā*, you are sleeping. Indeed, your awakening is after death. At that time you become fit for the witnessing of the pure truth face to face. Before that, [however,] you are unable to bear the verities save through the casting³⁹ of imaginative semblences in the heart. Therupon, due to the fixation of your gaze upon the sense[s], you believe that the thing has no meaning save for the imaginative [symbolic meaning], and [so] you become heedless of the spirit [of the image], just as you are heedless of your own spirit. [Hence] you grasp only the form.⁴⁰

This emphasis upon a non-literal understanding of the Hereafter is further corroborated and explicated by statements in the *Alchemy*, particularly in the section on “Knowledge of the Next World”. He writes:

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 261.

³⁹ His image here is that of a lead casting, and so this should be taken in the sense of “molding” rather than in the sense of “throwing”.

⁴⁰ *Jawāhir*, 32.

the pains which souls suffer after death all have their source in the excessive love of the world. The Prophet said that every believer, after death, will be tormented by ninety-nine snakes, each having nine heads. Some simple-minded people have examined the graves of unbelievers and wondered at failing to see these snakes. They do not understand that these snakes have their abode within the unbeliever's spirit, and they existed in him even before he died, for they were his own evil qualities symbolized, such as jealousy, hatred, hypocrisy, pride, deceit, etc., every one of which springs, directly or remotely, from love of the world. Such is the doom of those who, in the words of the Koran, "set their hearts on this world rather than on the next."⁴¹ If those snakes were merely external they might hope to escape their torment, if it were but for a moment; but being in their own inherent attributes, how can they escape?

. . . Every sinner thus carries with him into the world beyond death the instruments of his own punishment; and the Koran says truly, "Verily you shall see hell; you shall see it with the eyes of certainty,"⁴² and "hell surrounds the unbelievers."⁴³

Al-Ghazālī continues to describe how the root causes of torment in Hell, such as separation from the beloved things of the world, shame, disappointment and failure, can be symbolized: thus suggesting that the outward forms of the punishments are really just symbols representing the psycho-spiritual afflictions within the hearts of those attached to the world. This is echoed by what he says earlier in the same work, specifically in the section on self-knowledge. Here, he writes:

A soul which allows its lower faculties to dominate the higher is as one who should hand over an angel to the power of a dog or a Muslim to the tyranny of an unbeliever. The cultivation of demonic, animal, or angelic qualities results in the production of corresponding characters, which in the Day of Judgement will be manifested in visible shapes, the sensual appearing as swine, the ferocious as dogs and wolves, and the pure as angels.⁴⁴

Turning to the joys and pleasures of the next world, he presents a similar argument in the *Book of Love* (*Kitāb al-mahabbā*), specifically in his "explication that the most sublime of pleasures and that which is higher than them [all] is the gnosis of God—be He exalted—and

⁴¹ *Al-Nahl* (16): 107.

⁴² *Al-Takāthur* (102): 6–7.

⁴³ *Al-Tawba* (9): 49. This entire section is taken from *Alchemy*, 37–8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

the gazing upon His gracious face, and that it is inconceivable that any other pleasure could influence [these pleasures] except [in the case of] one who has been barred from this pleasure.” Here, he explains that the pleasures people seek are in accordance with their capacities for apprehension. Each faculty and instinct, he says, has a pleasure that is proper to it,

and just so in the heart there is an instinct which is called “the divine light” . . . And it may [also] be called the “inner vision” and “the light of faith and certitude”, but there is no purpose in getting caught up in naming . . .

For the heart is apart from the rest of the parts (*ajzā'*) of the body. As [one of] its attribute[s], it apprehends the meanings that are neither imaginative nor sensible, such as its apprehension of the creation of the universe or [the universe's] need for a pre-eternal Creator, an all-wise [being] who gives order [to everything], [a being] qualified by Divine attributes. Let us call that instinct an “intellect” on the condition that one does not understand from the term “intellect” [in this context] that which the ways of argumentation and disputation grasp by [their usage of the term] . . .⁴⁵

Al-Ghazālī goes on to explain that knowledge, more specifically the gnosis of God, together with His attributes and acts, is the chief pleasure of this instinct. “And one ought to know,” he adds, “that the pleasure of gnosis is the mightiest of all the remaining pleasures, by which I mean the pleasure[s] of desire, anger, and the rest of the five senses.”⁴⁶ As the passage progresses, al-Ghazālī becomes both more detailed and more emphatic. He explains that the highest forms of knowledge concerning the Divine mysteries can only be won by “tasting”, a form of mystical cognition which stands above discursive reasoning and about which speaking comes to little avail.⁴⁷

[But discussing it to] this extent steers you to [the realization] that the gnosis of God is the most pleasurable of things and that there is no pleasure above it. To [illustrate] this Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī said, “belonging to God there are some servants who are not distracted from God by the fear of Hell and the hope of Heaven, and so how could the world distract them from God?”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Ihyā'*, vol. V, 196–7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The true servants of God thus do not get caught up in the hope of Heaven and the fear of Hell, for all these pale in comparison to the pleasure of gnosis.

For the goal of all of the gnostics is reaching Him and meeting Him only. It is the delight of the eye of which no soul knows what is hidden from them. If it is attained, then all cares and desires are wiped away, and the heart becomes immersed in its blessedness. Were one to be thrown into the fire, he would not feel it by virtue of his immersion [in the tranquil, blessed state]. And, were the amenities of Paradise spread out before him, he would not take heed of them by reason of the perfection of his [state of] tranquility and [by reason of] his having reached the [highest] degree above which there is no degree. By my life! How can one who only understands the love of sensible things believe in the pleasure of gazing into the face of God—be He exalted—when He has no image nor shape? Which meaning would [God's] servants reckon to be Him—be He exalted—mentioning it to be the greatest of the graces? No way! He who knows God knows that the pleasures [that are] separated from all of the imagined desires are included beneath this [one] pleasure . . . And they only intend by this the preference [for] the pleasure of the heart in knowing God—be He exalted—over the pleasure[s] of food and drink and marriage. Paradise is a treasure-trove that gratifies the senses, but, as for the heart, its only delight is in meeting God.⁴⁹

These various quotations from various works, when taken all together, form a very revealing, rich, and potentially problematic collection. One might be tempted to suggest, based on such passages, a foundation for a philosophy of religion that would share significant features with that of the philosophers, particularly al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. So too with his somewhat “qur’ānicized” adoption of the philosophical psychology, which we touched upon in the previous chapter. Most important for our current investigation is what this passage tells us about the realm of the Hereafter and its relation to the material universe. The next world, it suggests, is exclusively about intelligible meaning—knowledge of God and/or God’s knowledge—and this can only be talked about and made accessible to others in our world through the employment of metaphorical or symbolic representations of these meanings: “semblances” or “similitudes” which are not true in themselves but are true with respect to the meanings they represent. Indeed, an overzealous clinging to their literal meanings can be, at times, tantamount to heresy, he says.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 201.

Can corporeality or materiality or anything this-worldly properly be attributed to the Hereafter? The answer would appear to be no, even though material imagery is attributed to it for the purpose of communicating something of these intelligible realities to the feeble, sleeping minds that make up the majority in the material world. In addition, it would seem that, in the light of al-Ghazālī's understanding of the process of cognition, the material image or phantasm is essential for all intellectual apprehension at all levels save the very highest, which is the ultimate goal of the gnostics. The "realm" from which the lights of the Unveiling dawn, the source "world" of prophetic knowledge, and the true home of the "noble, divine thing" that is the heart/intellect/spirit/soul appears to be nothing other than the mind of God for al-Ghazālī, an infinite world that encompasses both the end and the true beginning of the wayfarer's eternal journey.

If this is the case, then what is the heart? The heart, he explains in many places, is the "receptacle of knowledge"⁵⁰ and thus contains the *malakūt*, just as it is itself contained by the infinite "world" of God's knowledge. Although he never goes so far as to say that the heart is above *all* essential association with the material world, his mystical cosmology, when considered in the light of his esoteric psychology, seems to leave no room for any other possibility. We are thus compelled to argue that the heart, for al-Ghazālī, is immaterial, in addition to its being a self-subsisting, rational principle that both contains and is engulfed by the mind of God.

Still questions remain. How is it localized within the body, even after death? What exactly is the mode of connection facilitated by the *ṣadr* or *al-jabarūt*, such that the movements and behavior of the bodily parts have such a profound effect upon it? Does this mean then that the temporal events of the material universe have a simultaneous and equally profound effect within the timeless world of the *malakūt*? Also, is the imaginative faculty, the power that retains and associates the phantasms within the soul, part of the heart? How can this be if the heart is pure intellect? There is yet a great deal to be asked and understood of al-Ghazālī's psychology, if indeed these questions have answers. It seems that al-Ghazālī was much more concerned about moral and spiritual formation than he was

⁵⁰ *Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, 125.

about laying out a philosophical or psychological system, and so there may be no answers, at least not to these kinds of questions.

One place outside of the *Ihyā'* where we might look for answers is the *Mishkāt al-anwār*, (reportedly) his mystical commentary on the "light verse" (24: 35). However, this unique and somewhat enigmatic work, while seeming to incorporate additional elements from Ibn Sīnā's cosmological system, is still riddled with ambiguity⁵¹ and deserves a much fuller consideration than we are able to give it here. Keeping our eyes fixed on the texts of the *Ihyā'*, then, we set the *Mishkāt* aside, noting its relevance to our study while ruling it outside of our present parameters.

⁵¹ See Davidson's consideration of the *Mishkāt*, the attribution of which to al-Ghazālī he considers to be "virtually certain", in *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (NY: Oxford, 1992), esp. 130–144. While many of the "unexpected" insights he draws, such as the use of "light" to symbolize the intellect, are already apparent from a cursory perusal of the *Ihyā'*, we are uneasy with his tendency to cast al-Ghazālī into the role of a fox, hiding behind a "cloud of [Qur'ānic] verbiage", and with his seeming eagerness to read Ibn Sīnā into every such cloud.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WAYFARER'S FINAL JOURNEY: AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S ESOTERIC ESCHATOLOGY (CONCLUSION)

So what can or should we say about the true nature of the Afterlife, which takes place in this mysterious realm of infinite, intelligible meaning? Al-Ghazālī, even if he affirms the divine and totally separate nature of the soul, seems to be consistent in his affirmation of the reunion of the soul with its body for judgement and Afterlife. He also speaks of the soul as being somehow localized within the body, but the exact nature of this “connection” or localization remains something of an enigma. Insofar as these psychological questions bear on his personal view of the Afterlife, it would seem that we are left with a paradox: on the one hand, he clearly and consistently speaks of the Afterlife in *both* bodily and spiritual terms, and so it must be mixed; on the other hand, when pushed he seems to regard this “other world” as purely spiritual, having no relation to matter, and so the “life” awaiting us within this realm, it would seem, must likewise be pure and unadulterated. The tension between these two seemingly divergent directions of his writing is so easily identified that we must assume he was well aware of it. We know that this is precisely what compelled writers such as Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd to read him as one of the philosophers, albeit in the orthodox garb of a jurist, a *mutakallim*, and finally a Sufi. Far from feeling able to draw any sharp conclusions at this point, we look again into the *Iḥyā'* for an answer to this question, if indeed there is any to be found.

One possible solution lies in his treatment of the Divine attributes and the other *malakūtī* verities, such as the Pen and the Tablet. Returning to the parable in the *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*,¹ Knowledge (personified) both advises and explains:

Open your eye[s]; bring together the light of your two eyes, and fix it in my direction. If there appears to you the Pen with which I write

¹ Here the entire translation is our own (Arabic text, 125–6).

upon the Tablet of your heart, then it appears that you are ready for this way. For the Pen is revealed [to] everyone who [successfully] traverses the world of the *jabarūt* and knocks on one of the doors of the *malakūt*. Indeed, you see that the Prophet (May God bless him and grant him salvation) was shown the Pen in the very beginning of his ordeal [i.e. his prophetic experience], when it was revealed to him, "Recite! And your Lord is Most Gracious, who teaches by the Pen, teaches man that which he knew not".²

And so the wayfarer said, "I have opened my sight and fixed [my gaze], and—by God!—I see neither reed nor wood. And I do not know of any pen save one such as that." Thereupon Knowledge said, "You have rendered the search impossible [by looking thus]. Have you not heard that the furniture of the house 'resembles' the Lord of the house? Do you not know that God's essence—be He exalted—does not resemble the rest of the essences [in the created realms]? Just so, His Hand does not resemble hands, nor does His Pen resemble pens; nor does His Speech [resemble] the rest of the [types of] speech; nor His handwriting the rest of [the types of] handwriting. These Divine things are [all] of the world of the *malakūt*. God is not in Himself (*fī dhātīhi*) a body, nor is He in a space, in contrast with [all things] other than Him. His Hand is not [made of] flesh and bone and blood, in contrast to the hands [of all things other than Him]. His Pen is not of reed; nor is His Tablet of wood. Nor is His Speech of sound and letter . . . If you were unable to witness this [fact] in this way, then I can only regard you as one impotent [to choose] between the excellence of stripping all anthropomorphic imagery away from [your concept of] God and the womanliness of ascribing anthropomorphic imagery to God, wavering between this and that . . ."³

Knowledge later gives the wayfarer another chance, and this time the mystic is able to "see" the Pen that is unlike all other pens.

Upon [his having seen] this, he said farewell to Knowledge and thanked him, saying, "I have prolonged my stay with you and my purpose for [being with] you. [Now] I intend to journey [on] to the Presence of the Pen and ask Him about His circumstance".⁴

Here we are told that the material and anthropomorphic imagery applied to God and the other "Divine things" in the *malakūt* are only true when seen with the eyes of mystical insight. When seen in literal terms, they lead to the "effeminate" excess of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), which is an obstacle for further ascent into the

² *Al-Qalam* (96): 3–5.

³ *Kitāb al-tawhīd* . . . , 125.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 125–6.

intelligible world. At this level, then, al-Ghazālī is advocating a strictly allegorical reading of verities symbolized by material “likenesses”, such as the Pen and the Tablet, the Footstool and the Throne; they must be “seen” as inner forms that can only be grasped by the inner, intuitive eye rather than as literal, material attributes perceived by our materially-conditioned minds. So too with the many graphic images associated with the Afterlife, it could be argued.

Ever anticipating such questions, al-Ghazālī refutes this temptation to interpret away all Afterlife imagery, at least in his *kalāmī* discourse. For example, in the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, he presents a very sensible explanation for adhering to the literal descriptions of the corporeal Afterlife while applying allegorical interpretations to the anthropomorphic descriptions of God and the other spiritual realities mentioned above. With regard to the “Gathering and the Resurrection (*al-ḥaṣhr wa'l-nashr*),” he writes,

The Revealed Law has related both of these, and it is true. Believing in them is required, for [they]⁵ are possible according to the intellect. Its meaning is [God's] restoring [the individual] after having annihilated [him]. For God that is doable, just as [in the case of] the origination of everything . . .⁶

Similarly, in the case the interrogation of Munkar and Nakīr, he writes, “believing in it is required, because it is possible . . .”⁷ So too in the case of the torment of the grave, the weighing of deeds, the traversing of the bridge, and the rest of the eschatological events. Believing in them is required because they are conceivable, possible.⁸ Anthropomorphic and spatial descriptions of God, however, cannot be conceived as possible, and so the *meaning* of their outward form must take precedence over the form itself. In this way, he realizes his explicitly-stated goal of showing the harmony between the inner and the outer, the ultimate agreement and complementarity between allegorical interpretation and literal acceptance.⁹

It could be argued that these *kalāmī* texts, written at the level of

⁵ Literally, “it”. Although al-Ghazālī uses a masculine singular pronominal suffix here, it is clear that his intention is the two worlds together.

⁶ *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 152ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, see esp. 136.

the common people and the *mutakallimūn*, do not apply to the higher forms of discourse—such as the *Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul*, the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, the *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr*, etc.—and their intended audiences. Given all that we have seen in the course of this study, especially in the first, fourth, and fifth chapters, this seems a weighty suggestion. However, it would be somewhat reckless to take the suggestion as a conclusion before other texts and factors are weighed.

In an effort to clarify al-Ghazālī's eschatology, then, we naturally return to the work solely devoted to the subject, a work often taken to be a prime example of his literal and uncompromising adherence to the traditional Islamic teachings about death and the afterlife: the *Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba'dahu*. Here, specifically in the seventh chapter, he revisits the discussion about the various ways Muslims have interpreted the phenomena promised in the next world. After citing some traditions dealing with the psychologically-generated serpents and scorpions that are a part of the torment of the grave, al-Ghazālī poses a question and provides a lengthy answer:

Were you to ask, "But one time we saw the infidel in his grave, and we watched him, but we did not witness anything of that. So what is the mode of believing [when it is] contrary to the eyewitness [observation]?"

Then know that you have three stations (*maqāmāt*) in [reference to] the belief in the semblences of this [torment]. The first of them is the most evident, most correct, and the most beneficial, [namely] that you believe that they [truly] exist and [that] they bite the dead person. But you will not see that, for this eye does not help to see the things pertaining to the [realm of the] *malakūt*. Everything connected with the Afterlife is of the world of the *malakūt*. Why, you see the Companions (may God be pleased with them), how they used to believe in the descending of Gabriel when they would not see him, and [how] they believed that [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) saw him . . .

The second station is that you recall the matter of one who sleeps, [namely] that he sees in his sleep a snake biting him and he [actually] feels the pain of that to the extent that you see him cry out in his sleep, his brow breaking into a sweat, and him showing [signs of] discomfort in his place. All that is grasped from [within] himself, and [still] he suffers from it just as a conscious person suffers. Or he witnesses [all this] while you see him quiet on the outside and do not see any snake around him. [Still] the snake is there in truth, and the torment is occurring, but it—from your position—goes unwitnessed. If the torment is in the pain of the bite, then there is no difference between a snake that you imagine and a snake that you [actually] see.

The third station is that you know that the snake itself does not cause the pain; on the contrary, that which hits you is the venom. But then the venom is not the pain [itself]; rather your torment lies in the effect that has occurred within you by reason of the venom. Were something like that effect to occur without the venom, then the torment would [still] be sufficient. It is impossible to make that kind of torment known [to people] save through attributing it to the [natural] cause through which it normally comes . . . And these mortal attributes [of the soul] are transformed (*tataqallabu*) upon death into things that cause torment and pain in the soul. Hence their [inflicted] pains become like the pains of snakebites without there being any snakes . . .¹⁰

As is his custom, he reduces this somewhat theoretical discussion to a very practical and matter-of-fact conclusion, which comes just a page further down. He says,

If you ask, “of these three stations, what is the true one?” Know that there are those among the people who affirm the first and reject all else. And there are those who reject the first and affirm the second. And there are those who only affirm the third. However, the truth which was revealed to us by way of reflection is that all of that is within the realm of the possible and that whoever denies some of that [suffers from] a constriction of the gall bladder and is ignorant of the expanse of God’s power, be He praised, and of the wonders of His arrangement [of things] . . . Indeed, these three ways of torment are [all] possible, and believing in [all of] them is required. Perhaps a servant is punished through one type of these, and perhaps all three merge upon a servant. We seek refuge in God from His torment, be it little or much.

This is the truth, so believe in it on authority, for the one who knows that by [experiential] verification is rare on this simple earth. That which I advise is that you do not speculate overmuch in [trying to] figure that out. And do not occupy yourself in [seeking] the complete understanding of it. Rather, occupy yourself with [how to] manage preventing the torment in whatever way. For, if you neglect [your pious] works and worship and busy yourself [instead] with researching that, you would be like a person who had been taken by some authority, which imprisoned him in order to cut off his hand and amputate his ear. And so [the prisoner] spends the entire night wondering [whether the authority] will cut it with a knife or a sword or a razor, and he neglects [to think about] the way of contriving [a way] to rid himself of the source of the punishment. This is the pinnacle of ignorance. It is known for certain that, after death, either great

¹⁰ *Dhikr al-mawt*, 140.

punishment or eternal bliss [awaits] the servant, and so he ought to be prepared for it. As for searching after the details of the punishment and reward, it [amounts to] meddling and a waste of time.¹¹

This passage reminds us of al-Ghazālī's primary purpose in writing the *Ihyā'*: spiritual formation—the practical business of preparing such theoretically-inclined souls for the inevitable ordeal of death and its aftermath. He explicitly states and restates this throughout the *Ihyā'*, from the very first book to the very last. While some may argue that this is just a pious façade behind which he hides his Avicennian leanings, it seems too heavily emphasized and too consistent to be written off as a mere diversion technique designed to keep the common people and the theologians at bay. We are thus compelled to take him at his word, that is, to read him as a sincere advocate for the primacy of practice and character-reform. Indeed, as we noted near the end of the foregoing chapter, it seems that the formulation of a comprehensive theoretical “system” was a much lower priority—if a priority at all—than was the composition of a practical primer.

Having said this, we must grant that he does, even here, seem to leave ajar the door to the verities, and this is where some reflections and suggestions may be warranted. Our reading suggests that his personal position on the true nature of the next world cannot include corporeality, at least in an ontological or extramental sense. At the same time, however, his many statements in the more esoteric corners of the *Ihyā'* seem to indicate a psycho-spiritual “realm” that is *experientially* multilevel, including corporeal torments and pleasures. This is intimated by his frequent recourse to the intramental corporeality of the dream experience, an experiential reality that he invariably brings up in the middle of his eschatological commentaries.¹² This is further corroborated by a close analysis of the language he uses to describe the phenomena waiting beyond the threshold of death: almost always framed in the language of the individual's perception, which is for him far more important than the ontological status of these things in a theoretical vacuum. One might also take as corroborating evidence al-Ghazālī's theory of the

¹¹ Ibid., 142.

¹² And vice-versa. See, for example, his *Beginning of Guidance (Bidāya al-hidāya)* in Watt's *Faith and Practice*, 127–130, where the topic of death emerges in a section devoted to sleep.

universal, which differs from that of Ibn Sīnā in that al-Ghazālī's "universal" is never divorced from the phantasm, and so it comes closer to an archetype than to a universal in the Avicennian sense. Simply put, al-Ghazālī's universal indicates that the mind cannot divorce its thinking from images. This unwavering attention to perception even colors his mysticism: even the very pinnacle of the mystical experience is, for him, tantamount to a shift in perception rather than an ontological transformation;¹³ in other words, the moth is never *really* consumed by the flame, even though that may be the moth's *experience* of its encounter.

In the light of all this, one might still argue that al-Ghazālī is, in reality, subscribing to the very same philosophical eschatology that he condemns in the *Tahāfut* and even in other, much-later works, such as the *Munqidh* and *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa*, and that he is deceitfully subscribing to more than one truth: one for the masses, including the *mutakallimūn* (religious/exoteric), and one for the elite (philosophical/esoteric). Such has been the basic argument of al-Ghazālī's critics for nearly nine hundred years, from Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd to Richard Frank and Kojiro Nakamura. After all, Ibn Sīnā argues for most of what we are here attributing to al-Ghazālī; indeed, he even allows for the experiential reality of corporeal Afterlife imagery for most (but not all) people. For example, in his *Book of Salvation* (*Kitāb al-najāṭ*), which is the author's own abridgement of his philosophical masterwork, the *Book of Healing* (*Kitāb al-shifā'*), Ibn Sīnā writes,

It may also be true, as some theologians state, that when souls, supposing they are pure, leave the body, having firmly fixed within them some such beliefs regarding the future life as are appropriate to them, being the sort of picture which can properly be presented to the ordinary man—when such men as these leave the body, lacking both the force to draw them upwards to complete perfection (so that they achieve that supreme happiness) and likewise the yearning after such perfection (so that they experience that supreme misery), but all their spiritual dispositions are turned towards the lower world and drawn to the corporeal; since there is nothing to prevent celestial matter from being operable to the action of any soul upon it, these souls may well imagine all those after-life circumstances in which they believed as actually taking place before them, the instrument reinforcing their imagination being some kind of celestial body.

¹³ See his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*, esp. 118–121.

In this way these pure souls will really be spectators of the events of the grave and the resurrection about which they were told in this world, and all the good things of the after-life; the wicked souls will similarly behold, and suffer, the punishment that was portrayed to them here below. Certainly the imaginative picture is no weaker than the sensual image; rather it is the stronger and clearer of the two. This may be observed in dreams: the vision seen in sleep is often of greater moment in its kind than the impression of the senses. The image contemplated in the after-life is however more stable than that seen in dreams, because there are fewer obstacles in the way of its realization; the soul being isolated from the body, the receiving instrument is therefore absolutely clear . . .

These then are the baser sorts of celestial happiness and misery, which are apposite to base souls. As for the souls of the blessed, they are far removed from such circumstances; being perfect, they are united to the Essence, and are wholly plunged in true pleasure; they are forever free of gazing after what lies behind them, and the kingdom that was once theirs. If there had remained within them any trace of those things, whether by reason of dogmatic belief or through acceptance of a physical theory, they would be so injured thereby as to fall short of scaling the topmost peak of heaven, until that thing be finally obliterated from their souls.¹⁴

Is this, then, al-Ghazālī's real position on the Afterlife? Is he a masked Avicennean after all?

We approach the question somewhat differently. While al-Ghazālī does indeed seem to concord with Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of an immaterial soul and even with his concept of an Afterlife that affords no ontological status to the soul's corporeal associations and experiences, we argue that al-Ghazālī cannot be regarded as an Avicennean, even in his most intimate moments of disclosure. We argue that what is most crucial to unlocking al-Ghazālī's eschatology vis-à-vis the philosophical eschatology, which he condemns with fair consistency and (we argue) in good faith, is that, while the philosophical treatments of the soul and the Afterlife are all theoretically and ontologically oriented, al-Ghazālī's consistent and almost exclusive focus is on the individual's *experience* of these realities, a first-hand encounter that promises to be imbued with material associations for everyone, although in various degrees. To him, ontological speculation about the "true natures" of such matters is both irrelevant and distracting, a

¹⁴ From A.J. Arberry's rendering in *Avicenna on Theology* (London: John Murray, 1951), 74-76.

waste of valuable time, time that would be better spent preparing for the inevitable ordeals of death, reckoning, and eternity.

In the light of our reading, then, al-Ghazālī's unflinching insistence upon the belief in an Afterlife that includes corporeal torments and pleasures is extremely consistent with his esoteric thought, for he believes it to be both true to the servant's experience and to be most expedient in focusing the reader's efforts and attention on the true task-at-hand, which is the immediate challenge of reforming one's character and living one's life in preparation for the eternal journey. For Ibn Sīnā, the realities of things exist in a timeless vacuum. Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, emphasizes that these verities are only ever known through our minds, conditioned as they are by our tour in the world. Hence, for al-Ghazālī, to assert an incorporeal Afterlife is to err more than to hit the mark, even when the assertion is, theoretically speaking, true. Al-Ghazālī is willing to uphold and live with this paradox, even when his critics are not. Moreover, if we are to take late works such as the *Munqidh* and *Faiṣal al-tafrīqā* seriously, then we must also admit that he was willing to die with this paradox as well.

We do not, then, envision his psychology or his career to be an evolution from the material worldview of the *kalām* to the immaterial doctrines of Avicennian esotericism. Nor do we accuse him of upholding a double truth. We rather see his varied assertions and modes of discourse as reflections of different ends, all with an eye toward one eventual and ultimate end—the preparation for death and the adventure of the Afterlife, which is after all an experience, not a lesson in ontology. In the end, we argue that he was, above all else, a practical man, even in his mysticism.

APPENDIX

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY: “THE EPISTLE OF PRESENCE”

*The Chapter on the Commentary Concerning the Human Soul and Spirit*¹

Know that God—be He exalted—created the human person from two different things. The first of these is the murky, dense body, subject to generation and corruption, composed, put together, earthen.² Its state is not perfected except by another, which is the soul—substantive, singular, luminescent, cognizant, activating, motive—which is the perfecting agent for [its] instruments and bodies. God—be He exalted—put the body together from [various] bits of ash and caused it to grow by means of [various] bits of foodstuff.³ He made its foundation smooth, even, and made its pillars level, balanced. He particularized its limbs, and then He manifested the *jawhar* of the soul, from His command, [which is] singular and perfect, perfecting and beneficent. By “soul” I do not mean the faculty that seeks nutrition, nor do I mean the faculty that moves [the body] by reason of desire and anger. Nor do I mean the faculty residing within the heart that seeks to procreate for the purpose of [sustaining] life and is exposed to the senses. Nor do I mean the movement [emanating] from the heart to all of the extremities, for this faculty [being all of the above] is called the animal “spirit”. Sense and movement and appetite and anger are among its soldiers. That faculty seeking nourishment and residing freely within the liver is said to be a “natural spirit” (*rūḥ ṭabīʿī*), and among its attributes are

¹ *Al-Risāla*, 91–6. A translation of this section, and indeed the entire treatise, was published by Margaret Smith in the 1938 *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April Issue, 177–200, and July, 353–374). Although we differ with Smith regarding the authenticity of the work, her translation of the treatise is accurate and her introduction helpful. The translation here is our own, and the primary text upon which it is based is from *Majmūʿat rasāʾil al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiya, 1986/1406), vol. 3, 87–111.

² Literally, “of dust” (*ṭurābī*). The standard Qurʾānic term for the material from which humanity was made is clay rather than dust, although other terms, such as dry clay (*ṣaṣāʾil*) and sludge/mud (*ḥamāʾ*) are also used. Examples of the Qurʾānic usage abound: for example, see *al-Anʿām* (6): 2; *al-Hijr* (15): 29.

³ Literally, the text reads, “God—be He exalted—put the body together from the [various] bits of foodstuff and caused it to grow by means of [various] bits of ash.” Obviously, the natures of the parts somehow got reversed in the transcription of the text.

digestion and evacuation [of the bladder and bowels].⁴ And so with the imaginative faculty, the reproductive faculty, the growth faculty and the remaining natural faculties, all of them are servants for the body. And the body is the servant of the animal spirit, for it accepts the faculties from the body and makes use [of them] in accordance with its direction and movement [of the body].

Defining the Soul & its States

Rather by “soul” I mean that *jawhar*, perfect and singular, whose only concern is remembrance (*al-tadhakkur*), [self] observation/vigilance (*al-tahaffuz*), contemplation (*al- tafakkur*), discrimination (*al-tamyīz*), and deliberative reasoning (*al-rawīya*). It accepts/receives the [various kinds of] knowledge in their entirety, and it never wearies of receiving the pure forms stripped of matter. This *jawhar* is the captain of the souls and the commander of the faculties, all [of which] serve it and obey its order. Every group⁵ has a special name for the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*), by which I mean this *jawhar*, for the Muslim philosophers (*al-ḥukamāʾ*) call this *jawhar* the “rational soul” (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) while the Qurʾān calls it the “soul at rest” (*al-nafs al-mulmaʾinna*)⁶ and the “spirit of the [Divine] command” (*al-rūḥ al-amrī*), and the Sufis [use] the nomenclature of the “heart”. The difference lies in the names, for the meaning is one, concerning which there is no difference [between them]. For the heart and the spirit, according to us, as well as the [soul] at rest, all of them are names for the rational soul, and the rational soul is the living, acting, cognizing *jawhar*. And wherever we say the “absolute soul” or the “heart” we mean by it the *jawhar*.

The Animal Soul

Now the Sufis call the animal spirit a “soul” (*nafs*), and the Religious Law concurs with that, for it says, “your worst enemy is your [own] soul.”⁷ [In addition] the Lawgiver used the noun “soul”—and indeed confirmed it [when] he said, “your soul is that which is within you.”

⁴ Literally, “pushing out” or “dispelling”.

⁵ Literally, “according to each people” (*inda kulli qaum*).

⁶ *Sūrat al-fajr* (89): 27–8. According to the Qurʾānic classifications of the human soul, this is the highest form or state of soul. The author will discuss and explain the other two (Qurʾānic) states of soul in due course.

⁷ This is a Prophetic *ḥadīth* of unknown extraction. It is strange that no reference is made to al-Ghazālī’s parallel discussion of Sufi usage in the *Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajāʾib al-qalb* (see Chapter Four, *supra*).

This expression points to the appetitive and irascible faculties, for they originate in the [material] heart which is situated within [the body].

Once you have come to know the difference in names, know that the people researching [this subject] give expression to this precious *jawhar* with various expressions. The scholastic theologians, who are versed in the knowledge of dialectic, consider this soul a body, saying that it is a “subtle body” as opposed to this heavy, crude body. They do not see the difference between the spirit and the body except by way of subtlety and density. Some of them deem the the spirit to be an accident, and some of the physicians incline toward this doctrine; some of them see the blood as a spirit. All of them are satisfied with the limitation of their suppositions to their imaginations, and they have not sought the third part [of the soul’s reality]. Know, then, that the three parts are the body and the accident and the singular *jawhar*.

The animal spirit, then, is a subtle body, as if it were an ignited lamp placed within the glass of the heart, by which I mean that pine-cone-like shape suspended in the breast. Life is the shining luminescence of this lamp, and the blood is its oil.⁸ Sensation and motion are its light, while [carnal] appetite is its heat and anger its smoke. The faculty seeking nourishment which exists in the interior [of the body] is its servant and guard and deputy. This spirit is found in all animals.

The human being is a body, and his effects are accidents, but this [animal] spirit does not find its [own] way to knowledge, nor does it know the manner of [its own] making or the right of [its] maker. Indeed, it [i.e., the animal soul] is a servant, a prisoner that dies with the death of the body. Were the blood to increase, that lamp would go out due to excessive heat. Were the blood to decrease, it would go out due to excessive cold. For its extinction is the cause of the death of the body.

Neither the speech of the Creator—glory be to Him—nor the injunction of the Lawgiver [pertains] to this spirit, because the wild beasts and the rest of the animals are not held accountable and the judgments of the Religious Law are not addressed to them. The human being, however, is made accountable and is addressed [by the religious law] by virtue of another, additional meaning that is found to belong to him and is singled out for him. That [additional] meaning is the rational soul and the soul at rest, for this spirit is neither a body nor an accident due to the fact that it is from the command of God—be He exalted—just as He said: “Say: the spirit is from the command of my Lord”⁹ and “O, soul at rest, return to your Lord well pleased and well-pleasing.”¹⁰

⁸ Another obvious printing error is detected here, where the ة of “oil” (*dūhn*) is mistakenly printed as a , thus making “security” or “deposit” (*rahm*). Although the “light verse” is implicitly referred to in this discussion, no reference is made to the *Mishkāt*, which is wholly devoted to the verse.

⁹ *Sūrat al-isrā’* (17): 85.

¹⁰ *Sūrat al-fajr* (89): 27–8.

The True Nature of the Spirit

Now the command of the Creator—be He exalted—is not a body nor is it an accident; rather, it is a divine faculty (*quwwa ilāhīya*), like the primordial Intellect, the Tablet, and the Pen, all of which are singular *jawāhir*, [totally] separate from matter.¹¹ Indeed, they are pure, intelligible lights (*aḍwāʾ mujarrada maʿqūla*) that cannot be perceived by the senses. The [terms] “spirit” and “heart” in our previous usage are these *jawāhir*. They do not admit corruption, do not diminish, are not extinguished, and do not die; on the contrary, they separate from the body and await the return to it on the day of resurrection, just as it is related in the Religious Law. It was rightly stated in the philosophical sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmīya*), by way of decisive demonstrations and clear proofs, that the rational spirit is neither a body or accident. Rather, it is a permanent, everlasting *jawhar* that does not decay. But we can do without the reiteration of the demonstrations and the enumeration of the proofs because they are [already well] established and mentioned. Whoever wishes to verify them can refer to the appropriate books [dealing] with that art.¹²

As for our way [of knowing these things], it does not result by means of demonstrations; rather we rely on eyewitnessing and depend upon the vision of faith. When God—be He exalted—added the spirit to His command and sometimes to His might, He said, “And I breathed into him of my spirit”¹³ and “say: ‘the spirit is from the command of my Lord.’” He [also] said, “And we breathed into him of our spirit”.¹⁴ And God—be He exalted—hastened to add a body or “accident” to his spirit for the purpose of their mutual diminishing and alteration and for the speed of their passing away and [physical] corruption.

The Lawgiver, may God bless him and grant him salvation, said, “the spirits are recruited soldiers” and “the spirits of the martyrs are in the crops (*hawāṣil*) of green birds.” The accident does not remain after the distinction of the *jawhar*, because it is not self-subsisting, and the body admits decomposition, just as it is said, composition is from matter, and the form (*al-ṣūra*) is as it is related in the books. Once we have found these *āyāt* and Prophetic Traditions (*akhbār*) and rational demonstrations, we know that the spirit is a singular, perfect, and self-subsisting *jawhar* from which both the uprightness of religion and its corruption proceed.

¹¹ Within the same treatise, immediately before this chapter, he says that the soul is “the tablet of the [various] kinds of knowledge, as well as their place of residence and their receptacle.” The body cannot receive or contain knowledge, he says, because it is finite. But the soul, he says, “receives all of the [different] kinds of knowledge without resistance, crowding/jostling, weariness, or cessation.” (90)

¹² It is interesting to note here that he does not refer to specific titles as he does in many of his other books and treatises.

¹³ *Sūrat al-ḥijr* (15): 29; also *Ṣād* (38): 72.

¹⁴ *Sūrat al-tahrim* (66): 12. This *āya* describes how God caused the virginal con-

The Eyes of the Heart

The “natural spirit”, the “animal spirit” and all of the bodily faculties are among its servants¹⁵ even though this *jawhar* receives the forms of things known [to it] and the realities of existents [by means] other than through their eyes and through their individual [occurrences]. For the [human] soul is capable of knowing the reality of human nature by [a way of knowing] other than seeing an [individual] person, just as it comes to know the angels and the *shayāṭīn*.¹⁶ It does not need to have a vision of [all] the individual angels or devils, and thus the senses of the majority of people are not granted [a sensual perception] of either. A group of the Sufis have said that the heart has an eye, in the same way that the body has an eye. So he sees external phenomena by means of his external eye, and he sees the realities by means of the eye of the intellect. The Prophet of God—May God bless him and grant him salvation—said, “every single person’s heart has two eyes,” and they are the eyes by means of which he sees the unseen (*al-ghayb*). If God wills [something] good for a servant, He opens the two eyes of his heart so that he may see what is invisible.

The Spirit & the Body

And this spirit does not die upon the death of the body, because God—be He exalted—summons it to His threshold, saying “return to thy Lord.” Indeed, [this spirit] separates from the body and [then] abandons it. As a result of its separation, the states of the animal and natural faculties, for the [physical] mover becomes still. That stillness is called death. The people of the way, i.e., the Sufis, rely upon the spirit and the heart more than they rely upon the individual [embodied] person.

If the spirit is [indeed] from the command of the Creator—be He exalted—then it is like a stranger in the body and its countenance is [turned] toward its place of origin and return. If it is strong and un sullied with the pollution of nature, it is granted more benefits from the direction of its origin than it is given from the side of the [embodied] individual. Thus, if you have realized that the spirit is a singular *jawhar*, that the body must occupy space, and that the accident only remains

ception of Jesus by breathing His “spirit” (*rūh*) into Jesus, whose physical form was seemingly created in her womb at the same moment. The creation of Adam, the first human, is described in a strikingly similar way. See *Sūrat al-ḥijr* (15): 28–9.

¹⁵ Literally, “soldiers” (*junūd*).

¹⁶ Although this is often conventionally translated as “devils”, the English term carries connotations that really do not suit the Arabic term. Thus, I leave the Arabic here.

by [reason of the presence of] the *jawhar*, then know that this *jawhar* does not inhere in a receptacle, nor does it reside in a location. And [know that] the body is not the place of the spirit, nor the receptacle of the heart. Rather, the body is the tool of the spirit, the instrument of the heart, and the mount of the soul. The spirit, in its essence, is not conjoined to the parts of the body, nor is it [spacially] separate from the body; rather, it is closely concerned (*muqbil*) with the body, helping it and flowing through it.

The Spirit's Relation to the Brain & the Body

When it first revealed its light upon the brain, because the brain is its special [material] manifestation, the spirit made a guard out of the foremost part of it, and from its central area it made a minister and organizer, and out of its rear portion it made a treasurer and a treasure house. Out of the [various] parts, it made men and riders; it made a servant out of the animal spirit, and out of the natural spirit it produced a representative; it made a mount out of the body, and it made the world a sphere of activity. From life it produced commodities and wealth, and it brought forth commerce out of movement; it turned knowledge into profit and the hereafter into a goal and a homecoming.¹⁷ From the Religious Law it brought forth a [mystical] way and a method. It turned the soul inclined [toward evil]¹⁸ into a guard and a captain, and it made the self-reproaching soul¹⁹ an agent of awakening. Out of the senses it produced spies and eyes. From religion it fashioned armour. It made a teacher of the [practical] intellect and students out of sense perception. And behind all of this was the Lord—magnified be He—as a close observer.

The Reason behind the Soul's Embodiment

The soul did not, by means of this attribute and with this instrument, give itself to this [materially] dense individual [existence], nor did it join [the body] with its essence. Rather, utility debased it while its

¹⁷ Literally, "a place of returning".

¹⁸ See *Sūrat Yūsuf* (12): 53. This is the state of the soul in which it is prone toward mischief/evil. Like the black horse of the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus*, its tendency is to rush toward any object of desire.

¹⁹ See *Sūrat al-Qiyāma* (75): 2. This is the soul's state between *ammāra* and *mutma'inna*, the state in which it feels the pangs of regret, repents, and struggles to amend its ways.

countenance was turned toward its Creator, who commanded that [the soul] benefit [from its attachment to the body] for a specified time.²⁰ For the spirit is only occupied with the material [stuff] of the journey so that it may seek knowledge because knowledge will be its ornament in the abode of the Hereafter: “For the ornament(s) of wealth and children are the adornment(s) of the life of this world.”²¹

Just as the [bodily] eye is occupied with seeing the visible things; the hearing constantly perseveres in hearing the audible sounds; the tongue is ever ready to compose statements; the animal soul is [constantly] seeking the concupiscible pleasures, and the natural soul is in love with the pleasures of food and drink, so too the spirit at rest, by which I mean the heart, seeks only knowledge and derives pleasure from it alone. All of its existence is spent in learning, and all of it days, until the moment of its separation [from the body], it adorns itself with knowledge. Were it to concern itself with something other than knowledge, the spirit would only devote itself to it for the purpose of the body’s welfare, not for the sake of its own desired object nor for the love of its [own] origin.

So, once you have come to know the states of the spirit, the duration of its remaining, [the nature of] its strong love for knowledge and its passion for it, then you must learn the [different] categories of knowledge, for they are many. We will enumerate them in an abridged form.

The Ways of Knowing

Moving to other relevant portions of the Epistle, worthy of some attention is the author’s discussion of the various ways in which knowledge can be acquired. He intimates that a knowledge of the true natures of things can be obtained either through “decisive demonstrations and clear proofs” or through the more experiential path of “eyewitnessing” and “the vision of faith”, this latter path being his way, i.e., the way of the Sufis. He revisits this topic a bit later within

²⁰ He is making an allusion here to *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (6): 2 and 60, which read, “He it is who created you from clay; then he decreed a term, and a stated term is with Him . . .” and “It is He who takes you at night, who knows what you have done in the day; then He raises you [to life again] in [the new day], so that a pre-ordained term may be fulfilled; then to him is your homecoming . . .” See also *Sūrat al-Ẓumar* (39): 42.

²¹ Another Qur’ānic allusion: *Sūrat al-Kahf* (18): 46, which reads, “Wealth and sons are the adornments of the life of this world, but the abiding things, good deeds, are are better in your Lord’s [estimation], better in terms of rewards and in terms of hope.”

the very same treatise.²² Here, speaking of knowledge in a non-mystical vein, he divides knowledge into two distinct types: the religious/legal (*sharʿī*) and the intellectual (*ʿaqlī*). For the people who have grasped these ways of knowing, he says, “most of the religious/legal sciences are intellectual”, and “most of the intellectual sciences are religious/legal.” Still, however, he separates them into distinct categories and goes on to break them down still further.

The religious/legal sciences divide into the knowledge of the foundational principles and the knowledge of the branches. Knowing the foundational principles, he says, is more particularly called the “knowledge of affirming Divine unity” (*ilm al-tawḥīd*), which “looks into the nature of the essence of God—be He exalted—His pre-eternal attributes and his active attributes.” It also investigates “the states of the Prophets and the Imams and Companions after them. And it looks into the states of death and life and into the states of the raising and the resurrection and the gathering and the account,” as well as the “vision of Allāh—be He exalted. Those who undertake speculative investigation in this [field of] knowledge first take hold of the *āyāt* of Allāh—be He exalted—in the *Qurʾān*. Then [they cling to] the [orally] related Traditions of the Apostle—may God bless him and grant him salvation. Then [they rely upon] intellectual proofs and demonstrative syllogisms, for they have appropriated the basics of both general and dialectic syllogistic argumentation, with all their accessories, from the patrons of philosophical logic, and they have situated most of the [technical] expressions in incorrect contexts. They give expression [to their arguments] in the idiom of the *jawhar* and the “accident” and the “proof” (*al-dalīl*) and “speculative reasoning” (*al-naẓar*) and “inferential reasoning” (*al-istidlāl*) and “proof” (*al-ḥujja*).

The meaning of all of these expressions differs according to each group . . . but it is not the desired goal of this treatise to critique the meanings of the expressions according to the opinions of the group [under discussion], so we will not rush into it. Now these [intellectuals] of the group [under discussion] are specialists in [the science of] the *kalām* concerning the foundational principles and the science of *tawḥīd*, and they are called the *mutakallimūn*. Thus the [science of] *kalām* has become famous for the science of *tawḥīd*. And part of the knowledge of the foundational principles is the [science of] exegesis . . .²³

²² 96–100.

²³ Ibid., 96–7.

Thus, *al-kalām*—including the more foundational sciences of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and the knowledge of [Arabic] language²⁴—is the main representative of this first division of religious/legal knowledge.

The second type of religious/legal knowledge is the knowledge of the branches, which he distinguishes from the first type as being the practical science as opposed to the theoretical science.²⁵ This praxis-oriented knowledge includes the sciences of jurisprudence and ethics.

As for intellectual science or knowledge, he identifies three grades: the mathematical and logical; the natural (observational/experimental); and the speculative. We will focus on his explication of the third and highest grade of intellectual knowing. According to the author of the Epistle, the knowers of this category look into

the necessary and the possible, and then the investigation of the Maker [of the Universe] and His essence and all of His attributes and actions and commands and judgements and decrees, and the ordering of the appearance of the existents from Him. [Then there is] the investigation of the states of the angels and *shayāṭīn*. It ends with the science of prophecy, with the matter of the miracles [of the prophets] and the states of the miracles [of the saints], the investigation of the states of the sanctified souls, the state(s) of sleep and waking, and with the stations of visions. Among its branches are the knowledge of talismans (*al-ṭilasmāt*) and astrological fortune telling (*al-tabarrujāt*)²⁶ and whatever is related to them . . .²⁷

This highest level or grade of intellectual knowledge is rather obviously the grade of the philosophers, whose writings treat all of these topics.

Knowledge, he says, can be won either naturally or supernaturally, and these intellectual sciences, even in their highest form, are obtained naturally. Natural attainment, however, can be further divided into two general categories: the attainment of knowledge through “human learning”, and their attainment through something called “Divine learning”. The former is experienced by all humans and is the path of knowing through observation, sense perception, and [following] a method of some kind. The latter, however, is not

²⁴ Ibid., 98, where he gives a lengthy discourse—almost a sermon—on the crucial importance of mastering the Arabic language.

²⁵ Ibid., 99.

²⁶ Here, the text has another printing error, for the second dot of the initial *و* is missing, leading the reader to believe it is a *و*. This, however, would be nonsensical.

²⁷ Ibid., 100–101.

known to everyone. He says it can occur from both without and within: when it comes from outside, the author simply calls it “attainment through learning”, and when it comes from within, he calls it “being occupied with contemplation” (*al-tafakkur*).

And, on the interior, contemplation occupies the same place as learning does in the phenomenal world (*fi 'l-zāhir*), for learning [from without] is the individual's benefitting from the particular individual [teacher or instance], whereas contemplation is the [individual] soul's benefitting from the Universal Soul, and the Universal Soul is more potent in its impact and more powerful in its educating than all of the learned and intellectuals [combined]. The [forms of] knowledge (*al-'ulūm*)²⁸ are embedded in the principle of the souls by way of potentiality (*bi'l-quwwa*), like the seed in the earth and the jewel (*jawhar*) in the depth of the ocean or in the heart of the mine,²⁹ and “learning” is seeking that thing's emergence out of potentiality and into actuality (*min al-quwwa ilā 'l-f'l*). Teaching [on the other hand] is extracting it out of potentiality and into actuality. The learning soul resembles the soul of the teacher and approaches it by way of a [special] relation, for the knower who benefits [others] is like the farmer while the learner who benefits [from the teacher] is like the soil. The knowledge that is *in potentia* is like the seed, while the knowledge that is in actuality is like the plant. Thus, if the learner's soul becomes perfect, it becomes like the fruit-bearing tree or like the jewel [that has been] removed from the depth of the ocean.³⁰

This is the first and most common road of natural knowledge. While it is worthy of esteem in its own right, the second road, the way of contemplation, is superior in every way. He continues,

If the bodily faculties overpower the soul, then the learner stands in need of more learning all the time and needs to undergo hardship and fatigue and needs to seek the benefit, but if the light of the intellect overtakes the descriptions [provided by] sense, then the seeker can, with a little contemplation, do without a great deal of learning. Indeed, through an hour's contemplation the soul of the soft-minded [student] finds more benefit than what the soul of the hard-headed [student] finds in a whole year of learning. Thus, some people attain the sciences through learning and others through contemplation.

²⁸ Another printing error corrected: the J of *'ulūm* was missing, thus giving *'awm*, which means “swimming” and obviously is not appropriate here. The feminine singular noun adjective, which is functioning here as the predicate of the nominal sentence, also rules out the possibility of the latter and corroborates our correction to the text.

²⁹ His equivocal use of terms like *jawhar* and heart (*qalb*) is worth noting.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

[Of course] learning needs contemplation, for the human being cannot learn all of the particulars and universals and every knowable thing. On the contrary, he learns something, and through his contemplation of the sciences he deduces something. The majority of the speculative sciences and practical crafts were [thus] deduced by the souls of the wise, [who were able to do this] by virtue of the purity of their minds and the power of their thought and the sharpness of their intuition without any extra learning or attainment . . . the soul cannot all of the particular and universal things that are important to it through learning; rather, some of them [are acquired] through learning and others [are won] through speculation,³¹ as is seen in the customary ways of people, and some of them are deduced from his own mind by virtue of the purity of his thought . . .

And so, for all of the practical arts of the soul and the body, their preliminaries are obtained through learning and the rest are deduced from contemplation. When the gate of thought has been opened to the soul it comes to know how [to follow] the way of contemplation and how, through intuition, [to take] recourse to what it seeks. Then his heart is opened and his inner vision is opened, and he is able to actualize all that is potential in his heart without any extra seeking or additional fatigue.³²

This intellectual knowledge, he says in the previous section,³³ is singular in itself, and it gives rise to a composite science, a supernatural way of knowing that brings together all of the states of the two distinct ways of natural knowing (i.e. religious and intellectual). This is the Sufi way of knowing.

That composite science is the knowledge of the Sufis and the way of their states, for they have a special knowledge of a clear way that brings together the two [kinds] of knowledge. Their knowing includes [the knowledge of] the [spiritual] state (*al-ḥāl*), of time (*al-waqt*) and audition (*al-samāʿ*), of ecstasy (*al-wajd*) and longing (*al-shawq*), of intoxication (*al-sukr*) and sobriety (*al-saḥū*), of permanence/remaining (*al-ithbāt*) and obliteration (*al-mahw*), of poverty (*al-faqr*) and extinction (*al-fanāʾ*), of friendship/intimacy (*al-walāya*) and will (*al-irāda*), of the master and the novice and all that relates to their states in reference to the

³¹ Here the author seems to introduce a middle way, the way of speculation, a mode of deliberative reasoning that makes use of analogy and extrapolation from the known to the unknown. From the ensuing context (not included in the translated passage), this “middle way” seems much closer to contemplation than it does to learning. Indeed, the line between speculation and contemplation is not clearly drawn in the passage. The two do seem, however, to be mutually distinct, at least theoretically.

³² *Al-Risāla*, 102–3.

³³ See p. 101.

supererogatory spiritual exercises (*al-zawā'id*) and the descriptions (*al-awṣāf*) and the stations (*al-maqāmāt*). We will speak about these three [kinds of] knowledge in a special book, if Allāh—be He exalted—wills.³⁴

He explains that the mode of apprehension by which the Sufis come to know this composite science is inspiration (*al-ilhām*), an experiential way of knowing that can only be understood in distinction to revelation (*al-wahī*). While both kinds of apprehension are classified by the author under the single heading, “Divine education” (*al-ta'lim al-rabbānī*), they are technically separate. As for revelation, he explains it as a process of direct instruction between the Universal Intellect and the sanctified soul.

when the soul, in its very essence, is perfected, [then] the impurity of the natural [material] world, the filth of desire and the ephemeral, evanescent aspirations³⁵ all leave it. [Then] its countenance becomes [totally] occupied with its creator and establisher; it holds fast to the generosity of its Producer, and it relies upon His beneficence and upon the emanation of His light. And Allāh—be He exalted—by the goodness of His grace, draws near to that soul and totally envelops it. He looks upon it with a Divine gaze and makes of it a Tablet (*lawḥ*). And of the Universal Soul he fashions a Pen (*qalam*). Then, He imparts all of His knowledge upon the soul.³⁶ [Thus] the Universal Intellect becomes like the teacher while the sanctified soul [becomes] like the learner. Then all of the sciences arise for that soul, and all of the forms (*suwar*) become engraved upon it, [all this being] without any learning or contemplation. The verification of this is His utterance—be He exalted—to His Prophet, “and He taught you that which you did not know”.³⁷ Thus the knowledge of the prophets is more noble in rank than all of the sciences known to creatures because it is obtained from Allāh—be He exalted—without intermediary or device.³⁸

He illustrates this by recounting the Qur'ānic story of Adam and the angels from *Sūrat al-baqara*, which he wraps up with the following statement: “thus, among those possessing intellects, the matter has been established that the knowledge of the unseen engendered

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Although this is literally printed in the masculine singular, “hope/aspiration,” its accompanying adjective is feminine singular, thus suggesting that the proper form is the plural, which must be grammatically treated as feminine singular.

³⁶ In keeping with his deliberate use of a quasi-material metaphor here (i.e. that of a tablet and pen), he makes use of a very material image here; literally, it reads, “He engraves all of His knowledge upon the soul.”

³⁷ *Sūrat al-nisā'* (4): 113.

³⁸ *Al-Risāla*, 103–5.

by revelation is more potent and more complete than the acquired sciences".³⁹

As for inspiration, it proceeds not from the Universal Intellect, but from the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kullīya*).

Inspiration is [when] the Universal Soul gives indication to the particular, human soul by virtue of the degree of its purity and receptivity and by virtue of the potency⁴⁰ of its predisposition (*quwwat isti'dādiha*). It is a touch of revelation, for revelation is the declaration of the Command (*amr*) [from] the Unseen, while inspiration is its exposition. The knowledge resulting from revelation is called "prophetic knowledge" (*'ilm nabawī*) while that which results from inspiration is called "the knowledge of Presence" (*'ilm ladunī*), which occurs without any intermediary between the soul and the Creator. Indeed, it is like the light [shining forth] from the lamp of the Unseen, falling upon a heart that is pure, spacious,⁴¹ and soft. And that is due to the fact that all of the sciences are occurring [thoroughly] known in the *jawhar* of the First, Universal Soul, that *jawhar* which is among the first, separate, and pure *jawāhir*. [Its] relation to the First Intellect like the relation of air to Adam. It has been made clear that the Universal Intellect is more noble, more perfect, more powerful, and closer to the Creator than the Universal Soul, which is itself more powerful, more refined and more noble than the rest of creation.⁴² Thus, from the overflowing of the Universal Intellect, revelation⁴³ is engendered; and, from the overshadowing of the Universal Soul, inspiration is engendered. Thus revelation is the raiment of the prophets while inspiration is the adornment of the saints. As for the knowledge [imparted via] revelation, just as the soul [is unimaginable] without the intellect, so too the saint without the Prophet, and the same goes for inspiration without revelation, for it is weak compared to⁴⁴ revelation [and] powerful [when] adding visionary experience and knowledge [to] the knowledge of the

³⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁰ Although it is farther from the literal meaning of the text, I am tempted to read "intensity" here, for neither "faculty" nor "power" seem to fit the particular context.

⁴¹ Literally, "vacant" (*fāriḡh*).

⁴² Literally, "creatures" (*makhlūqāt*).

⁴³ The text erroneously puts "inspiration" both here and in the second position. When considered in the light of all that proceeds and follows this sentence, however, this is clearly another misprint. Indeed, this parallel, contrasting construction (between revelation and inspiration) is continued in the very next sentence.

⁴⁴ Here I translate "compared to" (*nisbatan li*) in place of "in relation [to]" (*bi 'l-nisbati ilā*). This better suits the flow of the context, which is clear, and is also closer to what is printed here. The printing error lies in the careless inclusion of the prefix ب ("bi") with the indefinite noun *nisba* and in the equally careless mistaking of the prefix ل ("li") for the *alef* of the definite article. Corroborating this is the conspicuous lack of the preposition *ilā* ("to") which is a necessary element in the second expression noted above.

prophets and the saints . . . The knowledge of Presence is [thus] for the people of prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*) and friendship/intimacy (*al-walāya*), just like that which was [given] to al-Khidr, where Allāh—be He exalted—tells [the believers] about him: “We instructed him in knowledge from Our Presence”.⁴⁵

The Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī bn Abī Ṭālib—may God ennoble his face—said, “I held my tongue in my mouth, and then a thousand gates of knowledge opened in my heart, and within each gate were a thousand gates” and “If a pillow were placed [before] me and I were to sit myself down upon it, I would give judgements for the people of the *Torah* according to their *Torah* and for the people of the *Gospel* according to their *Gospel* and for the people of the Qur’ān according to their *Furqān*.” Now this is a station that is unattainable by sheer human learning; rather one is adorned with this station by virtue of the power of the knowledge of Presence . . .

If Allāh—be He exalted—wishes to do something good with a servant, He raises the veil between his soul and the Soul which is the Tablet, in which He manifests the secrets of some of the hidden things and upon which are engraved the meanings of those hidden things. Then the Soul gives expression to them as it wishes to whom it wishes among His servants. The reality of wisdom is obtained from the knowledge of Presence, and if a human being does not reach this station, he is not a wise man, for wisdom is one of the gifts of Allāh—be He exalted. “He grants wisdom to whomever He wills, and [as for] the one who is given wisdom, much good has been given him, and only the possessors of intellects bear [this] in mind”.⁴⁶ That is because the attainers of this station of the knowledge of Presence have no need for a great deal of [systematic] attaining and exertion of learning, for they learn little but know much; they weary just a little and they rest a lot.⁴⁷

Finally, after explaining that the need for prophecy has ended with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, he closes the chapter by stressing the continuing need for inspiration.

As for the gate of inspiration, it is not blocked; the light of the Universal Soul has stretched out and is not cut off due to the continuing necessity and need of the souls for reassurance, renewal and reminding. In the same way that the people no longer need revealed texts and the [prophetic] summons, they still stand in need of reminding and direction⁴⁸ due to their total immersion in this temptation and to their ten-

⁴⁵ *Sūrat al-Kahf* (18): 65.

⁴⁶ *Sūrat al-Baqara* (2): 269.

⁴⁷ *Al-Risāla*, 105–7.

⁴⁸ Literally, this is “indication” (*al-tanbīh*) in the sense of calling someone’s attention to something or directing their attention to something.

dency to fall into these base desires. Thus Allāh—be He exalted—locked the door of revelation, [this] being a sign for the servants, and opened the gate of inspiration in [His] mercy and put [all] things in order. And He arranged the ranks so that they would know that Allāh is gentle with His servants, providing [means] to whomever He wills without any accounting.⁴⁹

This then is the author's fullest explanation of the nature and function of the knowledge of Presence, a way of knowing dependent upon the inspiration of the Universal soul without any mediation. This cannot be won through human endeavor, for it is contingent upon the free predilection of God. Nevertheless, a sincere seeker can prepare himself for the high station of Divine election, even though he—theoretically—may not be granted it. In the final chapter of the Epistle he says that there are three aspects or steps (*awjuh*) that can prepare one to receive this mystical knowledge of the Sufis. The first of these is

attaining all of the sciences and taking the lion's share of most of them. The second is the sincere disciplining [of the soul] and true god-wariness . . . and the third is contemplation, for, if the soul comes to know and trains itself in [the ways of] knowledge and then meditates upon what it knows according to the stipulations of contemplation, the gate of the Unseen will open itself to it . . . If the contemplative person makes his way along the path of righteousness, he will become one of those possessing intellects [of whom the *Qur'ān* speaks] and a window⁵⁰ will open between his heart and the world of the Unseen. He will become knowing, perfect, intelligizing, a recipient of inspiration and a confirmer [of the truth]. Just as he [the Prophet]—may God grant him peace and salvation—said, “an hour's meditation is better than sixty years of worship.” By God . . . we will enumerate the conditions/stipulations of meditation in another treatise, since the elucidation of contemplation along with its method and verity is an obscure matter that necessitates additional commentary and interpretation.

As is evident, the “Epistle of Presence” is replete with pertinent psychological material. However, if it is to be counted among al-Ghazālī's opera, it stands apart from his other works in many respects. Perhaps

⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁰ Literally, “an overhead aperture [as in a ceiling or roof] (*rawzina*) from the world of the Unseen in his heart.” Interestingly, this persian term is not the term al-Ghazālī uses in the *Kūtāb al-tawhīd wa 'l-tawakkul* (127) for the very same “window”. This is perhaps another factor to be weighed in the final evaluation of the authenticity of the Epistle.

the most conspicuous of these is the abundance of explicitly philosophical terms, many of which can be shown to originate in the popular *Theology of Aristotle*, which was in fact an Arabic translation of Porphyry's commentary on the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Neoplatonic terms frequently employed throughout the Epistle, such as *al-'aql al-kullī* (Universal Intellect) and *al-nafs al-kullīya* (Universal Soul),⁵¹ are found nowhere in the writings we have examined thus far, unless cited to represent the viewpoint of the philosophers. Even in highly esoteric contexts, such as the *kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul* and the *kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, we do not see such terms in al-Ghazālī's exposition of his own position. Why, then, should we find them here? In the words of Lazarus-Yafeh,

The common medieval philosophical terms (mostly Neoplatonic, but to a certain extent also Aristotelean) such as *'Uqūl* [understanding], *'Aql kullī* [Universal Intellect], *Nafs kullīya* [Universal Soul], *'Aql fa'āl* [Active Intellect], *'Aql ḥayyūlanī* [Material Intellect], *Mādda* [matter] etc.—are entirely absent from those books of al-Ghazzālī, which scholars have accepted as authentic books written by him. Only in those books of his which deal with the description and refutation of philosophical doctrines such as his *Maqāṣid*, *Tahāfut*, *Mihakk al-Nazar*, *Mi'yār al-'ilm* and to a lesser degree also in *Mizān al-'Amal*, does this terminology appear . . .⁵²

Although the author of the Epistle is also intent upon anchoring his arguments in the *Qur'ān* and the Prophetic traditions, the explicitly philosophical language and tone make this a markedly different text from those we have examined in the course of this study. Another conspicuous difference is the author's employment of the term "*jawhar*". For the vast majority of the texts we have examined, this term has served as a fairly conventional idiom associated with the *kalām*. Here, however, we will see it employed in an explicitly immaterial, philosophical sense—indeed the very sense he attributes to the philosophers the *Tahāfut* (see chapter two). At least as far as his *kalām* is concerned, the *jawhar* is and must be material; this is even verified by what the author says here about the "theologians" who are, in effect, Ash'arī atomists (al-Ghazālī included, we presume).

⁵¹ See Smith's introduction to the first translation, 183–4.

⁵² "Philosophical terms as a criterion of authenticity in the writings of al-Ghazzālī", *Studia Islamica*, XXV (1966), 112.

Moving into a more “unveiled” form of discourse, i.e., his mystical explication of the true natures of things, the author of the Epistle uses *jawhar* to signify a non-spatial, immaterial, self-subsisting, intelligible, and Divine thing. In short, as he himself says, it is the rational soul described by the philosophers. While it can be argued that the content of this declaration may not be far from the findings of chapters four and five of our study, the attribution of these qualities to the *jawhar* is. We thus are inclined to suspect the authenticity of this discussion, for nowhere else in the corpus of al-Ghazālī’s writings, be they *kalāmī* or esoteric, do we find the *jawhar* qualified in such a way. And the brief allusion to an embodied afterlife seems too abrupt to be anything but a token attempt to weave this more philosophical position into a “Ghazālīan” framework.

In addition to these points, “*amr*”, a Qur’ānic term frequently employed in the Epistle, is here used in a manner that does not represent al-Ghazālī’s standard psychological usage, at least in the texts we have studied in the course of this investigation. While sometimes rendering the Qur’ānic phrase, “*min amr rabbī*”, as “of my Lord’s command”, he is usually inclined to treat *amr* as a “thing” or “matter” or “affair”. This is certainly his intention when referring to the soul as an “*amr ‘ajīb rabbānī*” or “wondrous Divine thing” in the *Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb* and other places (see Chapter Four, *supra*).

Building on these brief observations, even a casual reader will be struck by the lack of references to al-Ghazālī’s other works in the Epistle, a clue that runs counter to al-Ghazālī’s characteristic habit of cross referencing (some may even say promoting) his works. We are thus inclined to side with Lazarus-Yafeh in regarding this treatise as a text composed by a post-Ghazālīan Sufi with strong Avicennian leanings, a Muslim mystic wishing to “bridge” a perceived dichotomy between the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā and the more traditional mysticism of al-Ghazālī. At the same time, however, we must concede that the suggestive esoteric content al-Ghazālī wove into the fabric of his more authentic works left him vulnerable to such interpretations.

These comments are admittedly too brief and altogether insufficient, but we nevertheless feel that some note is warranted by virtue of the Epistle’s attribution to al-Ghazālī. The Epistle is certainly worthy of a fuller study in its own right, and our inclusion of this partial translation and commentary achieve little more than calling attention to that obvious fact.

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